

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-22

“Fishers of Men”

Today's Gospel brings us to another one of my most favorite places on the face of this earth and that is the Sea of Galilee. I can just close my eyes and I am there, having been there twice – it is an indelible mark on my heart and my mind. Being able to look out at the sea, knowing that Jesus stood on the very shore of the Sea of Galilee – which is known as the Sea or Lake of Tiberius, or the Lake of Gennesaret (Gennesaret means ‘harp’ and if you were to look at a satellite image you would see that it does look like an ancient harp) is beyond imagination. It is certainly indescribable. In many spots it remains mostly unchanged to this day.

Jesus meets two sets of brothers – our beloved St. Andrew and Peter and then James and John. These four men are fishermen – making their livelihood from catching fish. Jesus tells them to leave everything and they should come and follow Him and He will make them “fishers of men!” There would be a great transformation that would take place in their lives – a transformation from fishermen to shepherds. There is a great difference between catching – and keeping – and that is the difference between a fisherman and a shepherd. That transformation would take the better part of three years to happen.

“Follow me” is a call to service. It is no small thing to give up everything to follow Jesus. To follow Christ is setting aside our own goals and pleasures and grasping onto the purposes for which God Almighty created us. Those purposes are:

- to know Him in a personal way and
- to make disciples of others by teaching them all of Christ's commands. All those who truly follow Christ must exchange their affections, goals and priorities for His.

When Jesus “called” Peter and Andrew their goal was to be successful fishermen. In asking them to forsake this goal, He commanded them to follow Him and He would “make them fishers for men's souls.” Jesus did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men but rather **He promised to MAKE them** fishers of men. Jesus doesn't just hit a switch and suddenly we are something. He transforms us, He carries us, and He nurtures us – just like He did those Apostles.

How does Fishing for Men Relate to Following Christ? To us a fisherman is someone with a fishing pole, maybe in hip boots, casting a lure into the waters of a stream or a lake. However, that was not the case when Jesus called His disciples. They caught fish with nets and by experience they found that their best fishing took place at night. We know that this is true by looking at Luke 5:5, when Jesus told Peter to cast his nets on the other side of the boat Peter said, “*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*” How did they fish at night? They used a very powerful and effective method of attracting fish, light. Fish were attracted to light.

Jesus uses this same effective method to draw people to Himself. John tells us that Jesus said,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Just as fish are attracted to the disciples light, God wants people to be drawn to His light shining through His people. The light of every believer is the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, and what He has done to transform us. I think you will agree that there is not a person here today who is the same person as they were before they met Jesus – no matter what age you were when you found Jesus. He cleans us up pretty well, you must admit! The light of every believer is the light of our Lord Jesus shining through in our lives, the things we think, we do and we say. Paul declared in his second letter to the Corinthians *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”* (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

To follow Jesus is a call that required complete and immediate detachment from everything else. Peter and Andrew *“left their boat”* suggesting that they walked away from their occupation. James and John *“left their father”* suggesting that following Christ takes priority over even being physically with our family. The requirements for following Jesus are not the same for everyone. For some it means leaving their current occupations to follow Him. For others it means a willingness to leave family connections and being close to family. My wife and kids and I know what both of these are like as we were transplanted from occupations and family – to serve Jesus in His church. For everyone it is a willingness to exchange their affections, connections, goals and priorities for those of Jesus.

Please don’t misunderstand me. The worse thing in life may not be that we fail. The greatest failures happen when we succeed in areas that are not God’s will for our lives and are not true to the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, a success that keeps us from pursuing God’s real plan for our lives. **The worse thing in life is not failing - but succeeding in a worldly endeavor - having left Christ out of our lives.**

So what is the single most important thing that we can do as Christians? When we know that someone is dying – one of the first questions that runs through many of our minds is “Are they saved?” What this should remind us of is that what really matters in life is what we are most concerned about at death – whether or not people know Jesus Christ. When someone is dying nothing else really matters, does it? I want to suggest to you that that question should be on our hearts and minds long before our friend or loved one is preparing to leave this world – it should be a priority in our lives to make sure that they know and love Jesus.

There have been times in the life of every Christian when they recognized that the greatest thing they could do in this life was introduce someone else to Christ. We don’t do the saving, just like when you plant a seed – you don’t break open the kernel and make it grow. You can water it, you can nourish it, you can do all those things, but it is the Holy Spirit that breaks it open and makes it grow. We don’t do the saving, but we can be like Andrew who introduced his brother Peter to Jesus, and we can introduce our friends and family to Him as well. Have you

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ever really stopped to realize that Jesus wants you to be someone whose heart is moved to reach out to the lost people around you? So in order to accomplish this goal in life – the question is - would you be willing to:

- Lay aside your personal ambition and plans in order to FULLY follow Christ?
- To better reflect the light of Christ to those around you in your words and your actions.
- Look for and take opportunities to share with others what Jesus has done for you?

On a mountain in the Galilee – shortly before Jesus would go with the disciples back to Jerusalem and ascend to the Father – He told the disciples that He has been given all authority on heaven and earth – and so He commissions believers with these words: “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” (Matthew 28:19-20) Besides telling us what to go and do on His behalf – He is also telling us that we are not doing this alone. Yes – this is called “the Great Commission” but I think that through the words “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” that Jesus is reminding us that we are not doing this alone – we are in a **co-mission** – right alongside Jesus Christ Himself.

We can then look at these words that Jesus said with new eyes and renewed meaning and transformed hearts: “*Follow me and I will make you Fishers of Men.*”