

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

***"Goin' Fishin'"***

Today's Holy Gospel brings us to the beautiful Sea of Galilee. It is there that Jesus meets two sets of brothers – our beloved St. Andrew and Peter and then James and John. These four men are fishermen – who are making their livelihood from catching fish. Jesus tells them to leave everything and that they should come and follow Him and He will make them "become *fishers of men!*" Several translations omit the word become, simply saying "*I will make you fishers of men.*" The Greek verb γίνομαι (*ginomai*) means "to come into being." This means that a transformational process will take place, and as we learn through the Gospels, there would be a great transformation in the Apostles' lives – the eventual 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. It is not like a light switch had been hit and it was turned on.

Jesus' words "*Follow me*" are a call to service. It is no small thing to give up everything to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus Christ is to set aside our own goals and pleasures and to grasp onto the purposes for which God 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 in life was to be successful fishermen. They wanted every haul to be a big one so that they could pay and take care of their families. In asking them to give up this goal, He asked them to follow Him and He would "make them become fishers for men's souls." Jesus promised to make them become fishers of mankind.

A lot of people see a fisherman as someone with a fishing pole who is casting a lure into the waters of a stream or a lake. But that was not the case back in the first century when Jesus called His disciples. They caught fish with nets cast from boats, and through quite a bit of 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 reluctantly said "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*" If you read John 21 – the Apostles were out fishing all night when they see the risen Jesus on the shore of the Galilee, where He makes them breakfast. So - how did they fish at night? They used an immensely powerful and effective method, light. You see - 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 that is shining through His people. The light of every believer is the

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presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. The Apostle Paul stated 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 means complete and immediate detachment from everything else. Peter and Andrew *“left their nets”* Zebedee, suggesting that they walked away from their occupation. James and John *“left their father”* suggesting that following Christ takes precedence over even maintaining close proximity to our family. That does not mean that they forgot totally about their families because we read later in the Gospel that Peter, living in Capernaum, his mother-in-law was sick and Jesus healed her. They were still connected to their families, after all, a marriage is a blessing from God.

We need to understand that the requirements for following Jesus are not the same for everyone.

- For some it means leaving their present occupations to follow him.
- For others it means being willing to leave family connections and being close to family. I know what both of these are like as we were transplanted from occupations and family – to serve Him in His church.
- For everyone it is a willingness to exchange their affections, goals, and priorities for his.

Jesus expects commitment. Do you know people who have a fear of commitment? They may date someone for years upon years and never want to make a commitment. It could be any type of commitment, saying I want to serve God in His church. Yes, I will serve on the Vestry, or whatever it might be. Or it might be fear of commitment. We have a lot of people who are sitting here today that have renounced that fear, and have said “God it will serve in whatever way it is that you want me to help. These fishermen had moved from merely associating with Jesus to being in fellowship with Him. They walked with Him, listening to His every word. Jesus was calling Peter to catch people for the purpose of giving them the message of life – eternal life.

I want you to fast forward nearly three years – again to John chapter 21. The risen Jesus calls out to the Apostles and asks them if they have caught anything. A similar situation to the one in Luke 5 takes place but here Jesus tells them to set their net over the other side of the boat. (Gentile side of the boat – rather than Jewish side.) In fishing in the Sea of Galilee, a good Jewish Fisherman would point his boat north, and then let down his nets on the left side of the boat – the side of the lake where Capernaum was. This was considered the Jewish side of the boat, as opposed to the Gentile side, or right side facing the Gadarenes and the Decapolis. Jesus is expanding their horizons – and expanding their catch – the whole world is for them to catch, and not just Israel. Right after this – after Jesus fed them once again – He reinstates Peter – undoing the three denials, and makes him not just a fisherman – but now – a shepherd asking him if he love Him? Jesus then tells Peter to *“tend My lambs; shepherd My sheep; tend*

*My sheep.*” (John 21:15,16,17) The transformation is complete. Peter is not a fisherman anymore but he is now Jesus’ shepherd.

There is a great difference between catching – and keeping and tending – and that is the difference between a fisherman and a shepherd.

As Christians, we sometimes get the impression that we have got to do it all. We try to take it all on our shoulders, as we try to go from A-Z. You know - God does not need us to do anything for Him. He is quite capable of creating a universe, with just a word, but He welcomes the efforts of those that He loves and honors and blesses those efforts – for they glorify Him. Jesus does not need the Apostles fish – but He invites them to bring their catch alongside His. He asks them to work alongside Him. Unlike Luke 5, this time Jesus told them to go out and cast the net and He was not in the boat – their efforts brought in the catch that He designed for them. And so it is in ministry – Jesus sends us out – to do the work He has given us to do – that He has designed for us to do - and He blesses us and guides us all the while.

- Yes, we are called to work hard for Him.
- Yes, we are supposed to be organized – and there is no excuse for laziness, sloppiness, or halfhearted effort in God’s Kingdom. If it is God’s work that we are doing – then we must do it with all of our might – and strive to do excellence in the process!

That is what I believe this message is all about. Jesus calls us to ministry in His Name – to come alongside Him and be taught and fed. I am reminded of the old adage: “Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day, but teach that man to fish and he’ll be fed for a lifetime.”

So, what is the most important thing we can do as *Fishers of Mankind*, and as Christians? Well, when we know that someone is dying – one of the first things that runs through our minds is “oh, I hope they are saved” You know what? What really matters in life is 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 long before our loved ones are preparing to leave this world – it should be a priority in our lives to make sure 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 Jesus Christ. We do not do the saving, for only God can do that! 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 ever really stopped to realize who Jesus wants you to be? He wants us to be someone whose heart is moved to reach out to the lost people around you. In order to accomplish this goal in life 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, your attitude, and your actions. And look for and take opportunities to share with others what Jesus has done for you.

Please remember the words of Jesus invitation: “*Follow me and I will make you become Fishers of Men.*”