

Third Sunday of Epiphany – January 26, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-22

“Let's Go Fishing”

I have to admit to you that when I read any Scripture or Gospel reading that is set at the Sea of Galilee, my mind instantly takes me there, having been there in 1999 and again in 2014. I daydream about the beauty of the Sea of Galilee. While it may be dabbled with ruins from buildings of a time gone by, the area remains pretty untouched and is so beautiful it is beyond words. I have been to some beautiful places on the face of the earth and one that stands out to me and I have been to four times is Bermuda. The crystal-clear blue-green water is just amazing. The flowers and the bushes are just incredible, and those bushes and flowers and beautiful water in this inland lake. I asked somebody while I was there the first time – and I said that there was bamboo, and all of these flowers that come from other parts of the world – were they brought here or did they just grow here? The answer was ‘we don't know!’ So, I sort of think that Jesus, knowing that He would be spending three years of His ministry by the Sea of Galilee set it so, and those remains are still there. The colors of the sea and the flowers and the terrain are absolutely beautiful. Don't get me wrong, but maybe in a year or two – we could have a trip to Israel from this church that Marilyn and I would be grateful to lead – taking you to all of the places in the New Testament and some in the Old Testament as well. Just pray about that. No plans yet, but just pray about it.

It was here that Jesus meets two sets of brothers – our beloved Andrew and Peter and then the sons of Zebedee, also known as the Sons of Thunder, James and John. These four men, their occupation are fishermen – not with a pole but with large nets from boats. Jesus tells them to leave everything behind 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.

Can you just imagine giving up everything to follow Jesus? Following Jesus is setting aside our own goals and pleasures and grasping onto the purposes for which God Almighty has created us. There was a pastor that several years ago wrote a book called “The Purpose Driven Life.” Each of us has a purpose, and God knows what that purpose is and unless we ask Him what that purpose is, we will struggle. Understand that following Jesus is setting aside our old goals and pleasures and grasping on to God's purposes. It is important for us to know him personally and to help spread His Gospel to others teaching them all of Christ's commands. All those who truly follow Christ will have to exchange their own priorities for His.

When Jesus “called” Peter and Andrew their goal in life 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 – He was going to do it for them, or as some translations say – fishers of people. 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.

These fishermen were hard working men – just like there are a lot of hard-working people in this church. Each one of us works to glorify God and to earn our payday so that we can continue to live and we can continue to give to Him. Their fishing was not for pleasure – just like when you go to work – you don't go for pleasure. You may get some pleasure in what you are doing, but that is not why you go. They caught fish with nets and their best fishing took place at night. Do y'all work the night shift? If you have ever worked the night shift – it turns your day upside down. When I started in radio, professional radio in 1973, I did the midnight to six shift. I was on the air from midnight until six in the morning, so my days were short – but my nights were long. That is what these fishermen's lives were like – they had families to attend to. They caught fish with nets at night. If we just look 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, the light of the world draws people to Himself by the light as well. 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) Those readings that were done this morning – there was one reading said that to God – light and darkness are alike to Him. There is no difference between night and day to God. God's light attracted people. Just as fish are attracted to the disciples light, God uses His people by letting His light shine through them to attract 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. Every one of us has a story to tell of how God has grabbed us and cleaned us up and brought us to Himself – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Just think about how you were before you found Jesus in your life. Some of us were not who we are today – by any stretch of the imagination. You have to admit it - He cleans us up pretty well. We all look pretty good on a Sunday morning – but we looked differently before Jesus founds us. You have to admit that. Some of us were not who we are today by any stretch of the imagination. The light of every believer is the light of our Lord Jesus shining through in our lives, the things we think, do and say. Jesus told us so Himself in Matthew 5:16 when He said, *“let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* We just need to invite Him in!

When somebody cuts you off on the roadway – do you smile or do you give them “hand signals?” Is that letting Christ's light shine? Think about that. That doesn't mean that we are supposed to lay down and get kicked around – that is what some people think Christians are – doormats. We are not doormats! But we are ‘radiant lighthouses’ for Christ's light to shine.

For these men - following Jesus required complete and immediate disconnection from everything else. Peter and Andrew walked away from their occupation. James and John *“left their father”* suggesting that following Christ takes priority over even being physically with our

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family. The requirements for following Jesus are not the same for everyone else. 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. In 2002 we sold our home in Jacksonville, and I left AT&T Universal Card – we went to Pittsburgh to be in seminary. It was a different life – I also left behind a radio career thinking that was it - I was done. I never dreamed that God would reconnect me to the microphone to be able to share music, Christian music with people, on one of the biggest stations here in Douglas. He has also given me the fun of being able to do a rock and roll show once a month in New York – from here. God loves to let us know that we don't have to say goodbye to everything. We might have to for a season – but He reconnect us – to the good things that make us smile. So I ask you today – “what floats your boat?” What makes your motor run? Is it making trailers and selling trailers? It can be. Is it doing a great job painting? It can be – especially when you can look at a beautiful sanctuary and say I painted that. Is it setting the altar; is it playing music in church; is it serving on the Vestry; is it loving your family intensely – as a mom or dad or grandpa or granddaddy? Is it taking care of some animals and taking them to a show in Pearson and coming in third overall? It can be – but that takes a lot of work. Hallie – let me ask you – when you work with those animals – is that joy for you? It is hard work – but it floats your boat. Hallie was a big winner yesterday at a cattle show, a 4 H cattle show in Pearson. That is what floats her boat. What floats your boat? May I ask you – is Christ in the boat with you? I hope so.

So what is the single most important thing that we can do as Christians? I want to suggest to you, while you are floating your boat, that we should be thinking about sharing the truth and love of Jesus with our friends and our family – it should be a priority in our lives to make sure that they know and love Jesus too.

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. I want you to understand that we don't do the saving. And so I ask people who are connected to agriculture - when you plant a seed – do you make it grow? No – you don't break open the kernel and make it grow. You can water it, you can nourish it, and fertilize it, you can do all those things, but it is the Holy Spirit that breaks it open and makes it grow. It chomps me at the bit when I hear preachers and evangelists saying well I brought 40 people to Christ – you introduced 40 people to Christ – but you didn't save them. You can't save ONE person. We don't and cannot do the saving, but we can be like our dear brother - St. Andrew who introduced his brother Peter to Jesus Christ, and we can introduce our friends and family to Him as well; we can introduce our children to Him as well – praying with them before meals at the table, telling them Bible stories, reading the Bible together. Have you 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 – that that just might float your boat? So I ask you – are you 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 – in your hand signals from the car – or not.
- Look for and take opportunities to share with others what Jesus has done for you in your life? I am not asking you to take a ‘rolly’ Bible out to a street corner, or with a sign saying, ‘the end is near.’ Just be as good as you can be, and let people see that Christ is in your life.

The risen Jesus met His disciples on a mountain in the Galilee, and we know it was before they all headed back to Jerusalem, where from the Mount of Olives, they would witness Him ascend to the Father – He told the disciples that He has been given all authority on heaven and earth – and so He commissions believers – you and me too - 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 to go and what do on His behalf – He is also telling us that we are not doing this alone. In fact right after those words Jesus comforted them and us by saying *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* He is here among us this morning, His Holy Spirit lives in our heart and we share His love, His Gospel and His commands to others – we are not alone – He is with us.

In closing today – I want to suggest to you that we need to listen and obey the words of Jesus when He says: *“Follow me and I will make you Fishers of Men.”* And so my brothers and sisters - Let’s go Fishing!