

Vicar Robb Roloff  
Matthew 4:12-25  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
January 27, 2008  
Title: Wanted: Fishers of Men

Our sermon this morning is based upon our Gospel reading in which the first of the disciples are called into the service of Christ and where we hear Jesus' words of, "*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Discipleship, what is it and how would you describe it to someone? Allow me to indulge you with a story that may help illustrate the point. The story goes something like this. There was a professional engineer working at a company designing automated equipment when one day he informed his employers and co-workers that he was quitting to become a missionary to bring the lost to Christ. Shock is perhaps the best word to describe the reaction he got as well as comments from friends such as "Don't you want to make a name for yourself in the world?" to which he replied "It depends on which world you speak of, the current one, or the one to come?"

Now as I pointed out, this is a story, although you should know that certain aspects to it are actually true. The last company I worked for as an engineer before coming to St. Louis did in fact have an engineer quit to become a missionary. Because he had left several years before I went to work there, I can't say for certain what kind of conversations or exchanges he had with his co-workers, although I can certainly imagine that they probably went something like what I used in the illustration. Why? Well because that's pretty much how my conversations went with those *very same* co-workers when I announced that I was leaving to become a minister.

It was interesting for me to hear some of the conversations concerning this individual before any of them knew of my intent to go to Concordia Seminary. “What a waste of an education” or “How could he throw his life away” were only some of the comments made. It kind of makes you wonder what kind of things they’ve been saying about me these last few years.

“*Come, follow me*” was the only direction Jesus gave to those first men who would become known as the Apostles. Jesus didn’t tell them where they would be going, how they would get there, or how long the journey would be, not even the cost that would be extracted for hearing and obeying these words of our Lord. All Jesus did was inform them of *what he* would make of them, principally, “*fishers of men.*”

Our reading for this morning immediately follows Jesus’ battle with Satan in the wilderness where this chief of the fallen angels tempted our Lord not to trust in God the Father. Twisting the words of Scripture to his own advantage, Satan attempted to get Christ to abandon the plan of salvation, which would forgive the sins of people and make them heirs of the kingdom of heaven. However, using Scripture to correct the Devil’s misuse of it, Jesus emerged from the desert victorious and now began his public ministry by declaring that the “*kingdom of heaven was near.*” In fact, it was nearer than any of the people who heard Jesus could have imagined, for the kingdom of heaven was present in the very person now proclaiming it and he was about to elicit help to do so.

The Jews had developed several false ideas or perceptions of the Messiah and one of them was that they thought he would carry out his work or ministry in or around Jerusalem. However, if they’d bother to verify this belief with Scripture, they would have seen that the

prophet Isaiah had prophesied<sup>1</sup> that the Messiah would in fact carry out his ministry in the lands that had been allotted to the tribes of Zebulun (zeb' yuh-luhn) and Naphtali (naf-tuh-li) an area now called Galilee. This region by Jesus' time had been heavily influenced by heathen nations and the people were living in spiritual and scriptural darkness. It was here that Jesus would carry out the majority of his ministry and it was here that *Jesus sought out* those who would eventually preach the gospel message.

At first, the selection of Peter, Andrew, James, and John might have seemed a rather odd selection to become fulltime disciples and preachers of salvation. After all, it is apparent that they didn't possess any special qualifications, at least by the standards of this world. These men were just your everyday common laborers, fishermen by trade, and probably not even educated beyond the ability to read from the Scriptures in the local synagogue. To put it simply, in today's world, they would not necessarily meet the seminaries requirements for admission. However, these men had met the first and foremost qualification for service to the Lord, he had called them to "come and follow him." They would come to recognize Jesus as their personal Savior by his call. What they would need to know to later carry out their new vocations as Apostles, Jesus would teach and equip them. Leaving their fishing nets behind, they would now embark upon the task of catching men and women for the kingdom of heaven.

Our sinful nature makes us unqualified in fact it makes it impossible for us to seek and find our Savior on our own, yet, in love, God came and *found us*. Jesus said, "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*"<sup>2</sup> Born into a world of sin and condemned to damnation because of our condition, God sought us out even though we are neither worthy nor

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:1f

<sup>2</sup> Luke 19:10

qualified. Christ called us to faith by His means of Grace, Word, and Sacrament, which were brought to us at some point in our lives by those who had also been called by Christ, to “come and follow him.” Jesus words that concluded his parable concerning the prodigal son certainly applies to our station in life, that, “...[we were] dead, [but now are] alive; [we were] lost, and [now are] found.”<sup>3</sup> We were at some point in our lives caught by the proverbial gospel “net” that brought us into the kingdom of heaven.

Those of us who have become frustrated over our efforts to get family members or friends to come to church or faith, must remember what we are called to do, and that it is God who brings individuals to faith. Using the gifts that God has given us, we are called to be faithful in throwing our various nets... talents or gifts from God, into the world in order for God’s alien work to begin working on the hearts of those with whom we meet sharing the gospel message.

Fishermen, especially those who catch fish using nets, will carefully use the proper nets, weights etc. in order to skillfully capture as many fish as possible, but they are always at the mercy of forces outside of their control in directing the number of fish *into* the net. This should certainly remind us of the miracle of Jesus, whereby he directed Peter and the others to lower their nets into the water on one side of the boat, and having caught nothing, Jesus directs them to drop the nets on the other side of the boat whereby they catch more fish than the net can handle. If God can control the fish of the sea to go where he wants them to, certainly we can trust that God would direct those whom he has chosen to come to faith.

Therefore, we need to be faithful with what God has provided and to realize what a joyful privilege it is to have been chosen by God to be in His family as well as the honor that comes

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:32

from spreading the gospel in its various forms. Saint Peter wrote concerning this that, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”*<sup>4</sup>

When Jesus approached the boats on the shoreline, while all the individuals working there to be sure called themselves fishermen, not all were the ones casting the nets. Some mended the nets, others steered the boat, while others sorted the catch for distribution, each doing his or her part. Working together, using the abilities given by God to gather as many fish as possible, each individual worked realizing that they were an integral part in the process.

I know that many in the church often don't feel this way, or have a sense that they themselves are not an important part of spreading the gospel. My mother for instance often felt that she wished she had done more to advance the kingdom of heaven, such as being a missionary or some such thing. Yet, she raised four Christian sons faithfully taking them to church every Sunday, taught Sunday school and openly spoke of her faith. She was doing exactly what she was called to do in her vocation as a Christian mother and wife. My mother needn't bemoan the fact that what she was faithfully doing was any less important than the work being carried out by missionaries, deaconesses or pastors. Like those mending the nets at the shoreline, each does according to their gifts to expand the kingdom of heaven, to catch men and women, boys and girls for Christ. Whatever station in life God has placed us in; God wants us to faithfully carry it out to the glory of God so that by our actions and words people may come to a knowledge of Christ the crucified.

Jesus' words to his disciples and us to “come, follow him” will take us to a hill outside the city of Jerusalem where he was nailed to a cross to take away the sins of the world. There, on that tree, Christ took my sins and yours unto himself so that the kingdom of heaven would be

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 4:10

ours for all eternity, so that on our last day, Jesus will say to each one of us, “*Come [follow me], you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*”<sup>5</sup>

**Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.**

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:34