

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

There was a man who always seemed to bring home a boatload of fish. It was uncanny, and people wondered how he could be so successful fishing. The game warden heard of this man's great success and asked to go with him. The two men started early one morning and went across the lake to a secluded area. The warden noticed that the fisherman did not have a fishing rod, just a net and a rusty old tackle box.

When they got to the appointed place, the fisherman opened the box and pulled out a stick of dynamite, lit it, and tossed it into the water. It blew up and fish rose to the surface. The fisherman began dipping his net into the water and putting the fish in the boat.

The warden then reached back and revealed from his hip pocket the credentials of a game warden! Calmly, the fisherman opened the tackle box again, got another stick of dynamite, lit the fuse, and handed it to the game warden. Then as the fuse burned down, the fisherman asked, "Are you going to fish or are you just going to sit there?"

Maybe now is the time to get involved rather than merely being a spectator or critic. Christians often wonder things like: Why are churches dying? Why is there so much violence in our neighborhoods? Why do people turn to drugs and alcohol even though they surely have heard the messages that addictions to these things destroy lives and even kill people? What's wrong with our nation—our world? Why doesn't someone do something? Why doesn't God fix everything?

Matthew West, a contemporary Christian music artist, wrote the song, "Do Something," which ponders these questions. Here are the words to the first verse and chorus to the song:

"I woke up this morning, Saw a world full of trouble now, I thought, 'How'd we ever get so far down?' And 'How's it ever gonna turn around?' So, I turned my eyes to Heaven, I thought, 'God, why don't You do something?' He said, 'I did—I created you!'"

If not us, then who? If not me and you? Right now. Well, it's time for us to do something. If not now, then when? Will we see an end to all this pain? It's not enough to do nothing. It's time for us to do something."

Today's scripture reading, the calling of four of Jesus' disciples, ignites a fire under us, calling us to do something. Through this text, Jesus invites us to go fishing—fishing for people.

This story is recorded in all of the gospels; however, it is very similar in the Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It appears that the gospel writers of Matthew and Luke built their stories upon Mark's precise telling of Jesus' life story.

Mark is believed to be the oldest of the gospels. Mark was the nephew of Barnabas who followed the Apostle Paul and helped with his mission of spreading the gospel. Barnabas brought Mark along and things went well as Mark helped them until Mark parted ways with them,

leaving Paul feeling angry. Later in Paul's ministry, there appears to have been a reconciliation between the two men.

The stories and lessons of Jesus were not written down until later in time. Mark did not know Jesus personally, so he must have learned of Jesus by word of mouth. Mark grew up in the center of the Christian community of Jerusalem, so there were many stories about Jesus floating around the community.

But Mark had a much more reliable resource from which to base his gospel—the Apostle Peter, a disciple of Jesus Christ himself. He heard Peter preach about Jesus in his community and likely as he traveled with his Uncle Barnabas and Paul. Mark's gospel is a record of the preaching material of Peter, written after Peter's death around A.D. 65. We can conclude then that Mark has the nearest telling of the Jesus story based on Peter's first-hand account.

Mark wrote this gospel to encourage the Roman Christians and to prove beyond a doubt that Jesus is the Messiah. He presents a rapid succession of vivid pictures of Jesus in action, where the other gospels tend to elaborate on what Jesus did and taught. Mark shows us Jesus' true identity by what he did and not so much by what he said. Mark shows us a man—Jesus on the move.

Why am I telling you all of this? I found it fascinating and telling that Mark wants to communicate to us that Jesus was a man of movement. He was not only a man who taught and preached the lessons of God—he lived them. Jesus set the example of what it means to be a Christian, which is every bit as important, but perhaps even more important than the words. Jesus example shows us the Christian lessons we might share with others.

Even when Jesus attempted to get away from the crowds to rest and spend some time with his Father, there was movement and growth in his spirit to nurture and energize his mission. Likewise, in our moments of rest and retreat, movement can happen in us as our bodies relax, and we find renewed energy. Our spirits are inspired by the voice of God reaching us through the quiet and peaceful space we create for ourselves.

Jesus continues to live this movement through his Holy Spirit in us when we accept his call to follow him. He does not say simply, "Follow me." He says, "Let's go fishing!" Follow my example and do something, today! If we're going to go fishing with Jesus, we need to follow his example, which shows us that this movement occurs not only within the liturgy of the sabbath and the temple walls, but beyond the temple walls, in the community and the world beyond our structures called churches.

We can't help but notice that when Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John, he was calling simple folk. They were not highly educated rich men. They were simply fishermen—the lower class of society. They did not have the skills of public speaking, healing, teaching, and all of those things they would later come to do after following Jesus. They had to grow in their faith just as all believers do, including you and me. And although it took some time for the disciples to understand Jesus' call and his message, the disciples kept following him. In the same way, we may question and stumble, but we must never stop following Jesus.

Jesus calls all who will listen to his voice today. Our education, societal rank, occupation, color of skin, gender do not go into his consideration of calling us to be his disciples. It does not matter whether we can speak eloquently, sing beautifully, play an instrument, quote lots of scripture, teach or preach. Our disabilities, our past shortcomings, our age do not eliminate us from the call of Jesus to follow him, to go fishing for people with him.

Having a busy schedule, filled with work, family responsibilities and play is not a good excuse for telling Jesus, not now, I'm busy. We can go fishing wherever we are and no matter what we may be doing. In fact, that's exactly when and where we should be fishing with Jesus.

Jesus summoned them by saying, "Follow me!" Did they know Jesus before this moment? Theologians differ on whether they knew him or not. Perhaps they had heard him

speak, or maybe they had only heard stories about him. Mark doesn't give us any of this information, but points us toward a message—that to follow Jesus requires movement of body and soul on our part. It sometimes requires taking a step out of what is known to us, what is comfortable to us.

In his calling, Jesus offered them nothing more than a task—to go fishing for people. He did not call them to a life of ease, but to a life of service. When Jesus calls us to follow him, we don't know exactly what we may be getting into—whom we will meet or what we may be asked to do. So, if you are someone who likes a well-laid-out plan for your life down the road, you may find this a bit difficult to accept.

You may remember the story of Jonah. He was called by God to go to Nineveh with a prophet's message to turn from their evil ways and return to God. He wasn't all that excited about doing this, so he tried to run away from God and got himself in a heap of trouble.

Once God rescued him from his predicament, Jonah went to Nineveh and shared God's message. Surprisingly, at least to Jonah, the people repented and returned to God, and God changed his plan to punish them. We may not always understand or like the task we are called to fulfill, but it is not for us to question God's purposes.

Theologian, William Barclay writes, "Jesus called his men, not to a comfortable ease and not to a lethargic inactivity; he called them to a task in which they would have to spend themselves and burn themselves up, and in the end, die for his sake and for the sake of their fellow men. He called them to a task wherein they could win something for themselves only by giving their all to him and to others."

Simon, Andrew, James, and John worked in a major industry—throwing and pulling nets to catch fish for people to eat. Jesus was calling them to a new major industry—fishing for people, challenging them to throw out their nets and pull them in with the same energy they had used to fish for food.

Why is the church dying? Why are there so many lost, lonely, despondent, and hurting people? Why does it seem that our world is falling apart? Maybe not enough of us have taken up the call to go fishing with Jesus. Do you hear him calling you to follow him? You know it may happen more than once. It did for the disciples.

There is a lot of work to be done. Do we, God's church here at HCOB, hear Jesus calling us to follow him? I have no doubt he is calling us. Will we drop whatever we are holding onto our cherished programs, and if needed, our fears of leaving the safety of what is familiar and comfortable to follow Jesus? There's so much work to be done.

In closing, listen to a few more words from Matthew West's song, and be inspired.

"I'm so tired of talking about how we are God's hands and feet. But it's easier to say than to be. Live like angels of apathy who tell us, 'It's alright: somebody else will do something.'"

"Well, I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of life with no desire. I don't want a flame; I want a fire. I wanna be the one who stands up and says, 'I'm gonna do something.'"

"If not us, then who? If not me and you? Right now. It's time for us to do something. Yes, it is. Come on. If not now, then when? Will we see an end to all this pain? Well, it's not enough to do nothing. It's time for us to do something."

Let's go fishing with Jesus!