

January 24, 2021

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Green)

Jonah 3:1-10

Mark 1:14-20

Sermon title: Fishing For Answers

John the baptizer is in prison. This is The end of John's ministry of the Old Testament - The good news, the Messiah, the kingdom of God is coming - repent and be prepared to receive forgiveness

The ministry of Jesus is beginning - the good new is here, the Messiah is here, the Kingdom of God has come near (in the presence of Jesus Christ) but not quite complete
- repent and receive the forgiveness of sins

The brothers Andrew and Peter had already met Jesus and heard his testimony after his baptism and before the call of Philip and Nathanael.

The brothers James and John were business partners with Andrew and Peter. This is an important point to make about these men called to be disciples - they were self-employed businessmen. Yes, they worked daily to catch fish and probably smelled like fish. They also prepared and took the fish to market for sale. Keep in mind, they did not have ice to preserve the fish like we see in markets today. The fish were sold fresh or could have been dried and salted for preservation. (Think of the boy who had 5 loaves and 2 fish that were used to feed the 5,000. These were dried, not fresh.)

These men had steady work, a business to manage, boats and nets to maintain, and employees to care for. Jesus was calling them away from their way of life to do something new.

Jesus said he would make them “Fishers of men” as we are used to hearing from the King James Version of the Bible.

Fishers of men. Why not hunters of men? Or trappers of men? We catch fish to eat them. We don't save their lives; just the opposite. What does calling disciples have to do with fishing?

These men happened to be fishermen so Jesus used an analogy that related to where they were and what they were doing.

These four fishermen used large nets to catch fish. They cast out the net into the water and allowed it to settle.

Then drew the net back in with a long rope that was threaded around the outer edge of the net trapping fish that are within the net.

After the net is brought in, the fish that were good for eating, they kept. Those that tasted bad and not worthy to sell were thrown aside.

Jesus uses this image of separation as a parable in (Matthew 13:47-48) to describe the kingdom of heaven.

The church, which represents the kingdom of heaven on earth, casts out a wide net inviting all who are within in it's reach to join the kingdom of God. Those who accept the invitation receive salvation. Those who ignore or reject the invitation receive nothing. Scripture says they will be thrown away or cast out.

Jesus uses this as a warning in different ways in the Gospels and in Revelation. Scripture is very clear. There is no place in the kingdom of God for those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

The fish symbol has become important in Christian tradition. Some people wear a cross or crucifix. The fish symbol has been used since the second century by Christians to identify each other.

Ichthys is the Greek word for 'fish' which in Greek is a word with 4 letters. It forms an acrostic that translates into English as 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior'. It describes the dual nature of Jesus as fully God and fully human.

Jesus invites these men first to become Disciples - students, learners
- "Come, follow me"

"Come, follow me" - Jesus calls the disciples into a relationship with him. This is a theme they continue as apostles. They continue to learn through the Holy Spirit that reminds them of the teachings of Jesus. They continue to grow their relationship with God through the ministry of Jesus even after his death. This is an example for us to continue learning as disciples of Jesus. We can never reach the end of discipleship during our life on earth.

Jesus continues: "and I will send you out to fish for people." Fishers of men - From the beginning Jesus establishes the goal for his disciples - to become apostles - evangelists of the good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus was teaching them to become the messengers (evangels) calling people to seek a relationship with God. Believe in Jesus, repent, receive the Holy Spirit. This is entry into the Kingdom of God and participating in its blessings.

Apostles - sent with authority - "Go, preach the gospel of the kingdom of God"

At first they were disciples - learning from Jesus. That is why they called him "rabbi" or teacher. The custom was that disciples learned spiritual truths and disciplines from their rabbi to prepare them to become spiritual teachers of others. Through discipleship they grew closer to God, becoming like the teacher but in their own way. In the Jewish tradition, disciples searched and selected a rabbi to follow. Kind of like a high school student choosing a college. Location, majors, placement.

Jesus reversed the process. He selected his disciples. They chose to answer his call. Scripture points out there were many other followers of Jesus who heard his teachings and sought him out to learn from him. But only the Twelve enjoyed the intimacy of private conversations in which Jesus gave them insights - about the parables; about his mission, suffering, death, resurrection

These disciples were very dependent on Jesus because his ministry was so different from that of the Jewish religious leaders of that time. The scribes, Pharisees, sadducees, and priests focused on acts of piety, interpreting and keeping the law (of Moses and the prophets), religious feasts and festivals, temple worship, and maintaining a position of authority. In the New Testament we find these Jewish leaders in and around Jerusalem.

Let's take a look at how Jesus was a different kind of rabbi or teacher.

Consider Acts of piety - praying, fasting, tithing, giving alms, making sacrifices. We call them spiritual disciplines. John Wesley called these ordinances of God.

Jews - openly prayed out loud in the temple for all to hear, tithed in a way that others could see their generosity, and fasted with sad faces and unkempt appearance so onlookers would marvel at their sacrifice. They acted out of custom and appearance to set a standard for others. Jesus called them hypocrites because They were outwardly pious but spiritually dead.

Jesus - went off to quiet places away from others to pray or to be alone with the Twelve. After a long day of teaching he went up on a mountainside to be alone with God. One morning his disciples were upset when they could not find him. They went looking for him and found him quietly praying by himself. He taught his disciples to go into their closet to pray.

Jesus did not seek attention but the crowds sought him out.

The Jews challenged Jesus on interpreting and keeping the law. Jews - the Sabbath laws were of the highest regard. Their customs defined what was legal on the Sabbath and what was not. Anything that could be viewed as “work” was not allowed. (find examples) This included how far you were allowed to walk; meals had to be prepared the day before; no medical treatment could be administered unless it was life-saving.

The word of the law was more important than the spirit of the law.

Jesus - the Sabbath was for people; not the people for the Sabbath. Jesus healed on the Sabbath which the Pharisees used as a charge against him to try to shame him. The disciples picked heads of grain from a field on the Sabbath because they were hungry. Jesus defended them using the example of King David and his army.

Jesus challenged the religious leaders because their application of God's laws were burdensome and dangerous.

Religious feasts and festivals

Jews - made these a show; profited from the sale of sacrificial animals; controlled the temple which was the only place for making sacrifices

Jesus - observed the OT celebrations, especially Passover, but did not use these for his own purposes. Except for his final week, the Passion Week. God preordained the time and place Jesus would be sacrificed on the cross. The final perfect sacrifice for the sins of humankind. The crucifixion marked the last time a blood sacrifice would be required by God.

Authority

Jews - claimed authority as descendents of Abraham; priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes were closed groups with privilege. They used their authority to control/repress the general population to keep peace and satisfy Roman rulers.

Jesus - His authority came from God through the Holy Spirit; He did not flaunt authority over others. When John and James asked if they could sit at his left and right side when he ruled in his kingdom Jesus humbled them. His teaching that the first would be last and the last would be first was a common thread. It was also counter to any human wisdom. Jesus welcomed all who would leave worldly self behind and enter the kingdom willingly. He spoke of a kingdom not of this world; better than anything devised by humankind.

The theme of Jesus teaching to his disciples is to seek the kingdom of God, not fulfill a set of religious instructions and activities. Just as God instructed the people of Israel to live differently from the unrighteous pagans around them, Jesus gave his disciples

instructions to live differently from the worldly influence of power and wealth that chased treasures that were temporary.

Jesus taught freedom, hope, promise - a new way of living as God's chosen people in this life and the life to come. These were to be qualities in his kingdom now and in the future. This was the new type of fishing Jesus was preparing his disciples to carry out and to be continued for generations to come throughout the world. It was not limited to Jews; it is available to all people who would hear and believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.