

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 49:1-7

Matthew 4:12-23

Catch the Light

I have heard this story hundreds of times and this time I discovered something new in the context of the text. Directly before this reading Jesus is in the desert being tempted by the devil. He comes out of the desert to discover his friend, mentor, the prophet who paved the way for his ministry has been arrested. His ministry has just begun and he finds himself moving to a new territory to get away from the despair and danger that surrounds him. All Jesus longs to do is to bring light into the dark places of the world. "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17) Repent in the Hebrew means 'turn around or change direction' but here in the Greek it means "See This" Open your mind to see things differently.

That is what the ministry of Jesus is really about. Seeing the world in a new light. Waking up to the possibility that we too could be a part of bringing the kingdom of heaven to this world. And that is what those who become disciples begin to glimpse in Jesus which is why they follow him.

Just as with the disciples we read about today Jesus still calls ordinary people in the middle of their ordinary lives to do extraordinary things. Everything we do and every person we are is worthy of God's attention and interest. Not just in our workplace but in our lives and perhaps even more importantly, in our relationships.

We live in a very relational world. In fact most surveys that ask people where they find their greatest sense of fulfillment, meaning, and purpose find the answers are almost always in relationships. Even those who identified their work as a source of meaning and fulfillment usually cited their relationships at work as the places of particular significance.

"All of which highlights one particular phrase in today's Gospel reading: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." ... Not "emissaries of the kingdom" or "heralds of God" or "disciples of the Messiah" or "witnesses of the divine" or even "the first Christians," but rather fishers of people. All of those other things may have been implied or may eventually come to be, but what strikes me is that Jesus is calling these first disciples not into work but into relationship."¹

That brings me back to the telling of the story and something that was highlighted for me by a few commentaries this week.

¹ Lose, David workingpreacher.org

Matthew tells us that Jesus had made his home in Capernaum. That means he was living in this small town where he called his disciples to follow him and be fishers of men. That means that it might not have been as abrupt or astounding a call as we might sometimes imagine or have understood it to be. Likely Peter and Andrew, James and John have seen Jesus around. They may even know him. They likely have heard some of his teachings at least (it's a very small town). For all we know Jesus is already in relationship with these fishermen and it may even be that relationship that gives them the courage, strength, will and desire to follow Jesus.

I like this interpretation because it might make it more easy for us to understand and grasp at. Some of us receive the kind of calling from God that is a sudden voice from the sky that we can't help but follow. And yet most of us head towards God's light in a more gentle relational way. We get to know some scriptures, or people, or faith needs and those things edge us towards the light. Some of us run towards it, others of us just take a glimpse from time to time unsure of how to let go of the other life we know and have become so accustomed to.

“Part of the challenge of a passage like this is that it is so difficult for most of us to imagine getting up and leaving everyone and everything we know to follow Jesus. And so we figure the disciples were extraordinary, first-century super heroes of the faith that we can admire but not identify with.”² And yet we know as we hear their stories they are much more ordinary than that. So I wonder what it would take to call us from our work places, and from our ordinary lives. What moved the disciples?

I think it was that they were willing to open their lives and hearts to something more. To a better, healthier world, not by making more money but through relationship. Jesus called them to be ‘fishers of people.’ Jesus calls them into relationship with himself, God, each other and with a variety of people. This Gospel continues on with another invitation to relationship to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them with the love, grace and relationship Jesus had taught them.

“Jesus issues the same call to us -- to be in genuine and real relationships with the people around us, and to be in those relationships the way Jesus was and is in relationship with his disciples and with us: bearing each other's burdens, caring for each other and especially the vulnerable, holding onto each other through thick and thin, always with the hope and promise of God's abundant grace. Sometimes that call -- to be in Christ-shaped relationship with others -- will take us far from home and sometimes it will take shape in and among the persons right around us. But it will always involve persons -- not simply a mission or a ministry or a movement, but actual, flesh-and-blood persons.”³

“Jesus called ordinary people right in the middle of their ordinary lives to be in relationship with the ordinary people all around them and through that did extraordinary things ... and he still does.”

² IBID

³ IBID

So with that in mind. I wonder if we might look at the call of discipleship from a different angle today. What does it mean to be fishers of people to you? What does it mean to bring forth the kingdom of God by being in holy relationship with one another?

Let's give it a try. I invite you to think of one person with whom you are in relationship. It might be a relationship that brings you particular joy, or sorry, or frustration, or hope. It doesn't really matter as long as it is significant.

Now that you have that person in mind, I invite you to take a moment to pray for that person. I invite you also to listen to how God desires to help you bring light and love (God's kingdom) to that relationship. How is God calling you to make a difference in the life of the person you are praying for?

You see, it's not that Jesus is calling you to just go outside your walls and world and be fishers of people. God has been calling you to this from your birth, in every relationship you participate. In fact God uses you to care for those God loves so much. What if we saw the light in the darkness that way? What if we saw every relationship as a way to bring the kingdom of God near?

I am convinced that God is already working in and through you to care for those around you, drawing all of us into deeper, Christ-shaped relationships with those God has placed in our lives. And that, I think, is precisely what it means to be a disciple and fisher of people.

And so today I invite you to catch the light, and then shine it forth to all the world.