

Jesus Went Fishing
Mark 1:14-20
Colebrook Congregational Church
Third Sunday After Epiphany 2015

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel, and it has the sense of always rushing forward, expecting the return of Jesus at any moment. The first chapter is very packed, Mark is not about to waste any time with too many details! John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of Jesus, Jesus is Baptized, Jesus was Tempted in the Desert, then our selection marking the beginning of Jesus' ministry & and his calling the first disciples, then Jesus goes to Capernaum to teach in the synagogue, then heal a man with an unclean spirit, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, then heals the townfolk, then Jesus starts a preaching tour in Galilee, and finally Jesus heals a leper. This is all just the first chapter! That's a lot for only 45 verses!

Today's selection is repeated in all four gospels, and compared to the others, it is the shortest, the most pithy. A Biblical equivalent of going (whistle & head movement). When I spoke to Vima before choir rehearsal about the hymns for today, I told her about the selection and did the same whistle and motion...and immediately walked right into one of the poles downstairs.

The selection starts off the ending of John the Baptist's ministry. The other Gospels report that after John the Baptist is arrested, he is executed. This is a definite break in eras. John is done, it is now time for Jesus, and Jesus came preaching. One of the scholars I recently read had an interesting take on this that I liked. He said, "Jesus could have written a books. Instead, Jesus came preaching. He trusted He most precious sayings to the blemished reputation and precious memory of his friends." To me, this also means that He intended the Word, the Good News, to be for everyone. If He wrote, only those who could read would be able to receive the Good News, limiting the reach of His ministry. Nearly everyone could hear and understand the spoken word, so that is how Jesus starts spreading the Good News, in a way that allowed as many people as possible to hear Him.

The first words we hear Jesus say in the Gospel of Mark starts with a

common phrase to Jewish apocalyptic texts, The time is fulfilled, literally meaning that the time foreseen by the prophets is occurring now. Remember that the Gospel of Mark is the one that is a performance, rushing the story of Jesus because they believed that Jesus would return during their lifetime, and then start fulfilling apocalyptic promises. Jesus then becomes unique with the next phrases. The Kingdom of God is nearing, which can be frightening to people, but then Jesus gives comfort to any who may feel frightened about this: Repent and Believe in the Good News. It was common for itinerants to wander around demanding that people repent, but Jesus includes a happiness component, the Good News!

Following this, Jesus went to call the first of his Disciples. He went around the Sea of Galilee, and he found a pair of brothers named Simon and Andrew out in a boat fishing. There would have been a lot of people there, there are family and workers and other boat crews, Jesus could have Called any of them, but he saw something in Simon and Andrew, some potential, something that no one else could see in them.

He asked them, a couple of fishermen, to follow Him and He would make them “Fish for People.” They put aside their nets and followed him. The same thing happens with a second pair of brothers. Even though they put aside everything they have known, Jesus does not want them to give up the skills they've acquired over a lifetime of fishing. By Jesus saying that they will “fish for people,” their abilities are not going to be thrown away, but re-employed in the service of God.

In the case of those four disciples, who led fishing boat crews, they would know how to lead a group, how to manage groups of people, how to teach their acquired skills to new fishermen, and how to attract a catch. They will be re-employing these skills to spread the Good News and attract more disciples to Jesus.

This happens at churches or other organizations all the time. An accountant would help keep the books, carpenters would build things, musicians would

perform in or with the choir, artists would design the websites or beautify things, teachers would assist with educating...and mothers...they can do anything!

When I was in the pre-ministry program in college, I was rubbish with kids. I really disliked them. I tried interning with two different church youth programs, and I walked away from both. I could not handle them and their behavior. At divinity school, I was slightly better. Serving in AmeriCorps, teaching underperforming students how to read, assisting with homework, teaching specials, running a photography program, and then running a therapeutic afterschool program for youths with multiple disorders, I acquired a lot of experience in managing and motivating children and youth. I learned about having patience. I vowed never to talk down to youths. I saw how listening and being responsive to their concerns went very far in having constructive and beneficial interactions.

While in Worcester, I served at a church that had asked me to re-start their youth program. At first, I did not want to. Remembering the attempts back in college, I was honestly afraid to try again. I was able to teach Sunday School, but I had adamantly refused to be involved with youth programming. I was convinced to give it a shot, and was given an assistant and an out if I wanted to take it. So, I found myself organizing a Rock-a-Thon as a kick-off fundraising event for the youth program. We successfully raised enough seed money to have the program be self-sufficient from the rest of the budget, and attracted a good number of the church's youth and their friends to attend weekly programs.

And I realized that I was using the skills that I had acquired through my life experiences from the outside world, but now within the church community. That patience from sitting with a learning disabled student sounding out words translated into patiently not reacting to frustrating or attention-seeking behaviors. The refusal to talk down to youths cultivated honest conversations, and built respect because of the equal treatment. I was able to sit and listen to the life dramas that disturbed the peace the my youths, being

an outlet for them, that many would seek out when they needed someone to talk to.

Before working at that church, if you told me that one day I would be on the phone after midnight counseling a couple of youths from my program that had just broken up, and was doing so patiently without me yelling at them for waking me up, I would not have believed it, but I discovered that when I brought my everyday experiences into the church, in the service of God and God's community, I was okay with it. I was happy that they chose to seek me out instead of letting their anger with each other just build up and lash out at each other.

No matter what our experiences, abilities, trainings, or specialties, be it professional or enthusiast, we all have something that can be brought and used in the service of God's community. Some things are obvious. And some things more indirectly. It is up to each of us to decide how best to serve.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayers

[PAUSE]

God of the prophets, you call us from worldly pursuits to serve you. Fulfill in us your commonwealth of justice and joy, that the light of your presence may be revealed to all nations, let us lift our hearts in faith to the one who hears all prayers and holds close all those in need. Listen to the cries of those who pray to you, and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name, all people will know the power of love at work in the world.

We especially pray for:

We pray for the healing to all wounds, make whole all that is broken, speak truth to all illusion, and shed light in every darkness, that all creation will see your glory and know your Good News. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offertory

O God, we offer these gifts to be used to benefit your church and our mission throughout the world. Bless the giver and those who cannot give. Grant us the wisdom to use these gifts in the manner you want us do. Amen.