

“Agents for God’s Kin-dom”

Rev. Jayneann McIntosh, Lead Pastor
First United Methodist Church of Wausau
February 10, 2019

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret [also known as the Sea of Galilee], and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

“Great! Now Simon has wandered off to follow some crazy rabbi. And James and John with him! What are we supposed to do? Two boat. We need three men in each boat. And they just up and left. The nets aren’t even ready for tonight.

“What’s it matter? We don’t have enough men to take the boats out now anyway. Simon’s son, he’s got his own work. The cousins? They’re willing but they’re so young yet; they don’t have muscle for the work. Still, it’s got to be done. How else will the families eat?

“And what are we supposed to do with all this fish? It’s more than our baskets will hold. Even if we had the baskets, we can’t carry it all there in time. And what about Jose, Saul, Ephraim and the men on their boats. With all this fish, the prices will go down. Will we even manage to pay our crews?

“The crowd’s breaking up. Hey! Wait! People, want some fish?”

That’s Nathan from the other boat. Simon is thinking:

“What am I doing? I’ve never done anything wild in my life. This is crazy! But the way this Jesus talks, his voice, his eyes. He’s compelling. And all those people following after him, bringing their relatives to be helped. What is it about him?

“And, why did he ask me? I mean, I’m honored but I’m no one special. All I did was put down the net and almost sink the boat pulling the catch in. I shouldn’t have left Nathan alone. He’s always been able to count on me. Barbara won’t be happy. But she and her mother will

be okay. Daniel will look after them. And I'll only be gone a few weeks then I'll be back. I just need to learn what it is about this man that draws so many people.”

So begins one life-changing journey

Jesus begins his teaching in the synagogue. In the previous chapter of Luke, he reads the scroll from the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (4:18-19). Then Jesus proclaims the scripture fulfilled.

He begins teaching the crowd, healing the sick, and preaching the good news of God’s kingdom. So, the crowd follows and presses in on him today. Much of Jesus’ ministry would be done in the open air – on the road, by the shore, in the marketplace. In so doing, Jesus challenges us to move beyond the church building to wherever the people are. Only then can we see the crowd. People need to hear God’s good news but this only happens when it’s delivered where they are.

Jesus uses what’s available to reach the people; this time it’s a boat. John Wesley, that founder of the Methodist movement, similarly improvised. When he was barred from preaching in the Epworth Church because of his radical notions, he crossed the churchyard and stood on his father’s tomb so that he was high enough – John was only 5’3” – that folks could see him and hear him. He learned that God as Spirit will move wherever she will move to reach the people. So even though as an Anglican priest he preferred a warm indoor venue, he came to preach wherever a crowd would gather.

I think we’ve lost this. We – not just us here at First Church – but most Methodists, and U.S. Christians in general. We wait for people to come to our church and then we welcome them. Or we hold an event and then watch for them to join us on Sunday morning. That’s not the example we find in our denominational history. Nor in Jesus’ story.

Simon is as ordinary as they come. It may be that he never went to synagogue. But hearing Jesus only briefly, he trusts him. As he grows in discipleship, he begins to step out. Steps out of the boat. Steps out of his comfort zone. Public speaking. Accepting foreigners. If Jesus had stayed indoors, Simon might never have become Peter, the rock. We sometimes think Jesus’ first disciples are different from us. But they aren’t. They’re ordinary people living their lives as best they can who are privileged to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

Lots of people have encounters with Jesus. Many of you have experienced them. I have. Last month we talked about these God moments. We talked about how wonderful they are. But we also talked about how the moment doesn’t last all by itself. Unless we change our patterns in some way, unless we build on it so that we are ready for more such occurrences, the moment fades.

In a very real sense, whether our encounter with Jesus is a one-time event or an eternal one is up to us. Jesus invites Peter to join him. Peter’s response makes all the difference.

Among the crowd, many who hear Jesus’ preaching consider this event a one-time thing. None, not even Peter, realize the long-term, life-altering commitment. But by doing something outside the box, Peter opens himself to more of God’s shaping.

What is the state of your discipleship? Is Christ central in your life or something you fit in around the sides? Is coming to the church something you do for the kids? Or because “it’s what

you do on Sundays”? Is your giving a sign of your trust in God in all facets of your life, or is it paying dues? When someone brings up God outside of church, do you stammer awkwardly and hope they change the subject quickly? Or do you share a story about God in your life? And once you’ve developed a bit of a relationship, do you offer to pick them up and bring them to church next Sunday?

Today’s text is a call, to you and me, to fish for people. Where do you have openings in *your* life?

Becki encourages her boys to have friends over Saturday night. Then on Sunday morning, she brings everyone to church. Jill met Lori at grief group. Jill knew Lori needed what God offers and that Lori was fairly new to Wisconsin. Now Lori’s a fixture at Jill’s church. Both are life-long Methodists but Lori had had trouble finding a church that felt like home when she moved and had been floating for a couple years.

Richard walks every day, stopping to talk with people along the way. He’d talked with one neighbor for two years, establishing himself as a listening, caring person, before talking about God.

Arthur leads a bible study at work. Cynthia tells about her small CD group. Anne talks about the mission trips. Barbara, about Truman’s sermons. Irv tells about how God led him beyond his drinking.

To fish for people, we have to be where the people are. We need to have something that will draw them in. The nets we use are our own stories about God’s action in our lives. How trusting in Christ keeps us in a better place. How coming to church each week feeds your being and replenishes you for the coming week.

This is the call for all of us. Some folks believe it’s the pastor’s job to evangelize, to bring people into the church and fill the pews. And as one more Christian, it is my job as much as it is yours, but not mine exclusively. It takes all of us, talking over the fence with our neighbor or over break at work or across the deli counter at the supermarket, to connect with people and invite them to join us.

The call to fish for people is a call to gather women and men for God’s kin-dom. This call authorizes us as representatives of Christ to be agents of God’s kin-dom. Agents of God’s realm. That’s what we’re called to be, every day, as we go about our lives. We still go to work, still buy groceries, exercise and get together with friends. But we do it as agent of God’s realm. We don’t wait until we know enough or are good enough.

Jesus calls Simon, and others, while they’re in the midst of their routine activities. They are not called because of their qualifications, character or potential. They are simply called.

And, notice that this call does not come in a holy place but in the midst of the fisherman's daily work when they’re wet, dirty and smelly. This is important because while God sometimes calls people in holy places, God’s kin-dom work is always reaching into the entire field of life.

Fishing for people is your purpose in life – not an add on. Along with your work and play, God has claimed you to see all the people and to tell them your story of God working in you and on you and through you. Don’t preach. Simply share your story.

If you have not been doing this, it will likely be uncomfortable the first, second and maybe third time. But it gets easier. You begin to sense that you are not alone. God as Spirit is present with you.

It helps to have your story ready. So as Rob plays, as you head home, think about your story. What piece might you share? It doesn't have to be elaborate. You're simply opening the door. Then this week, tell three people. God knows you can do it!

Amen.