

What Are We Called to Be Mark 1:14-20

In spite of all the progress of computers and automobiles; human rights work and space flight , the basic human condition remains much the same: We live with family in a mutual relationship. We support them and they support us. In addition we must work to pay for our food and shelter and so we spend our lives doing many things to fulfill these obligations. Often life can seem like doing, doing, doing. In spite of the temptation to think that all times past were slower - more thoughtful times, we remember that the fishermen in today's Gospel were living in a hectic world of Roman occupation where much of the food grown was shipped out to Rome for taxes. And so these hard working fishing families were trying to make a living by feeding the people of Israel with fish, because as we all know, fish will not stay fresh for the long trip to Rome and so I imagine these families felt extra pressure to do, do, do - maybe especially the strong, young men in their prime.

And so in the midst of their doing the work of dutiful sons in the family business and husbands to young families, along comes this itinerant preacher and says follow me and I will make you "fishers of people." And they do. This is perhaps Jesus' greatest miracle. He calls working people, dutiful family members and productive members of the community, to leave everything and become people who will not feed people's bodies, but free their hearts and souls with Good News.

How does this happen? These fisherman were not rich, but their businesses had hired hands, and so they were not poor. Certainly they knew the risk to following a prophet. Israel had seen many prophets die at the hand of kings, and the Romans were not very tolerant of religious zealots either. But still they followed him. What must Jesus have been like to compel them to leave it all and follow? He must have had a quality about him that was different; light, or joy, or peace or all three.... And it is amazing how he accomplishes it without a lot of detail. "Come and I will make you Fishers of Men." It is not a contract – a list of expectations of the specific work to be

done, for pay of eternal life and fame - it is a call to be something different like Jesus. Being something different has a long history in the Church. When some of our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers choose a vocation – being a Nun or a Priest or a Brother - it is a decision to follow with one's whole being - not just taking a new job. A calling - or as it is sometimes called, a vocation, is much more than a job. And I'm not sure how to break it to you, but in our Protestant tradition all who seek to follow Christ have a life-long vocation – Oh, some of us as part of our vocation are asked to do some leading and help us remember we are all called – that's where clergy come in, but all of us have the same call as Christians: to be Fishers of People.

It's kind of a funny calling really. Are we to go out to the mall on University with a pole and a hook baited with a Hostess HoHo on the end and snag some people. John Wentz and Fred Damianos – I don't want to see your names in the paper trying this.... One of the things that may help us make sense of this is call is to remember that in Jesus' time, the sea – the great waters – are a symbol of chaos and fear for the people of Israel. The waters are full of “sea monsters” as some of the scriptures suggest. In the New Earth envisioned by John in his Revelation - the sea is no more. It is removed because it is dangerous and chaotic and can turn on you. Which is why, by the way, Jesus' calming of the waves is such a big deal of a miracle.

Given that background then we can see ourselves as fishers that net – and they were net fishers in Jesus time - fishers that are called to help people rise out of the chaos and confusion of their lives. We are called to share with them how God has lifted us out of the tyranny of the do-do-do life. And no matter if we help a homeless person find work and shelter, or by comfort the millionaire who is in despair, wondering what it is all for, or comforting those in mourning and grief - we fulfill this call.

And in spite of how miraculous Jesus' call to Simon and Andrew; James and John, it is not about a magic technique, but like Jesus we are called to be something different in the world – this is how people are compelled to join us on the path of faith. And so

part of our work is to let God continually break us free from the tyranny of doing and the weariness of the world, and the fear that is cultivated in our society. This is how we become fishers of people. Writer Anne Lamott describes our call this way:

“I think joy and sweetness and affection are a spiritual path. We’re here to know God, to love and serve God, and to be blown away by the beauty and miracle of nature. You just have to get rid of so much baggage to be light enough to dance, to sing, to play. You don’t have time to carry grudges; you don’t have time to cling to the need to be right”

Anne Lamott is right in suggesting the biggest challenge of our call is not what we take up, but what we have to lay down: those things which weigh us down like resentments, fears, the ego mind that tells us our existence is on the line if we don’t get that job or snag that boyfriend or be shown to be right. Some of the weights may be grudges of long ago wrongs that freeze us in place and time: as we mistakenly wait for a remedy that will never come. Forgiveness may be key for our becoming free of weight. Sometimes we forget that we do not forgive for the sake of the other : the one being forgiven; but rather, we forgive for our own well being. Forgiveness is necessary for our own physical health and our continued growth as spiritual beings. What baggage do we need to get rid of as we enter this new year? What preparations do we need to make before we go fishing? I have some things that I constantly need to throw out - things that are just unnecessary baggage.

As we move forward as Faith UCC in 2015 we will seek to fulfill our calling. We will seek to grow, spiritually and numerically – not just by techniques or amazing media campaigns, these might bring people here initially. But we will fish remembering that people will only join us in the journey – they will only be netted to use the fishing metaphor again, if when they come here they see something different than they see everyday in the news and in their day to day life – things like joy and love and peace and acceptance and safety to weep and to laugh. Many of our newer members have said they stayed because of the genuine love and care and joy that is here. We have that real key to being fishers of people. So let us set aside the things that weigh us down and

invite people to come to this place - not to increase our numbers but to help them find the path of more joy and more peace. We invite them to share their burdens as we continually help each other lay them down. We welcome people too because they may have the wisdom to help us lay aside a weight that holds us back.

I think Anne Lamott is correct. Our task is to love and serve God by dancing, singing and playing with a lightness of being. As Jesus says in another Gospel, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” So let us resolve to lay aside the things that weigh us down as we move forward in 2015. Let us be fishers of people by being the most joyous, free and compelling people in Bradenton. Who knows, we may end up luring some fishermen and fisherwomen in to join us.