

CALLED AND SENT TO FISH FOR PEOPLE

A sermon for January 21, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Gospel: **MARK 1:14-20** ¹⁴“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’ ¹⁶And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ ¹⁸They immediately left their nets and followed Him. ¹⁹When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. ²⁰And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.”

Are you called?

I know you are! You are called to be either disciples or apostles. **Disciples** follow, **apostles** are sent out. First you become a disciple. You are called to do the every-day work of the church. Then you may be sent out to continue the work of the church in your community or in the world...to be an ambassador -- an ambassador for Christ.

A lady was taking her five-year-old to church every Sunday. As they went to church she said, **“We are visiting God’s house.”** One Sunday, sitting in the pew, the little girl embarrassed her mother when she asked, in a loud voice, **“You said we are visiting God’s house. Why is God never home?”**

Do you ever wonder on a Sunday morning whether God is at home in the sanctuary? You probably do, yet we keep coming to his sanctuary. But God is at home everywhere not only in the sanctuary. God cannot be contained in the walls of a building. God is found everywhere people are gathered or going about their business.

He also knows where people are not!

This being true, the Lord made himself available at the seashore because the time had come for people to be told to repent and receive the good news of the kingdom. He was not looking for pious Jews working in the temple or synagogue because the pious ones already knew what they were about. They knew who they were serving. They knew God to be their God and they to be his servants.

Jesus showed up by the Sea of Galilee where he saw **Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting their nets -- for they were fishermen.** Jesus was looking for his first disciples to declare the dawning of God’s Kingdom. In order to do this, he had to find his first followers, Jesus made an effort to **find people where they were** in life. So, He walked by the Sea of Galilee to find ‘fishermen’.

In our time, many outside the walls of temples, synagogues or churches have little or no knowledge of God. To get people to know God, we must find them where they are - - at their place of work, in the Mall, at the baseball game, in restaurants and bars, at

home watching TV, in places like the museum. Our **ministry**, our **mission**, our **calling** is to find people where they are in life and invite them into the Kingdom of God.

When we recite the third article of the Nicene Creed, we say the following words: “**We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church...**” I call your attention to the words **catholic** and **apostolic**. The word **Catholic** refers to the **church universal**, meaning, **wherever believers are in this world**. And the word **apostolic** refers to the mission of that universal church. It is commissioned to go out into the world. We are a mission church -- a **church on the move** -- a church **sent out into the world to ‘make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ and teaching them to obey God**.

The Lord Jesus called the first **Disciples** saying, “**Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.**”

Jesus made the effort to find places and locations where people were going about their lives. There he called them and commissioned them to fish for people. Was the Lord aggressive? Absolutely! As a church are we apostolic? We are supposed to be! Our denominational identification is the ELCA ... the first word is Evangelical. The ELCA is also part of the global Christian church in mission. IN MISSION!

The term “**evangelical**” comes from the Greek word **euangelion**, meaning “**good news**” or the “**gospel**.” Thus, the inclusion of the word evangelical focuses on the mission of spreading the “good news” of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus Christ. This means that we must be intentionally aggressive to seek people in all nations and make them disciples of Christ.

In America, the word evangelical has come to refer to a particular Christian sect that emphasizes the teachings and authority of the Scriptures. It teaches that salvation is achieved by a personal conversion to faith in the atonement of Christ. At the same time, ‘evangelicals’ hold on to fundamentalist conservative views. They now have become a political movement.

That’s not who we are. We are *evangelical* in the sense that our primary mission is to spread the good news and win over (or fish for) people for Christ.

Where do we find people? Busy doing their day-to-day chores, just like Jesus did. Jesus sends us out to find them there. I don’t know what type of net is needed or how sharp the hook should be. But this I do know, **people are not fish**.

However, people can be fishy if you know what I mean. They are slippery and hard to hold on to. You will **need the best net and the best hook you can imagine -- probably a custom-made one. One especially designed** for each individual person. **One-sized hook or one-sized net won’t work for all**. Custom-sized methods must be employed if we are to fish for people, for people can be fishy...slippery! Better be wise!

How many of you have been on a fishing expedition? Catch-and-release 'hobby' fishing can be thrilling but at the end of the day, all you have is a photograph. 'Professional' fishers, on the other hand, don't practice catch-and-release. They catch fish to retain them. For them, fishing is a living and navigating the oceans can be treacherous. They must know the rules for safe fishing -- they must know the waters; they must know the weather; they must know the seasons of the year.

Jesus is not calling you for 'catch-and-release'! He is calling you to catch and retain!

Last Sunday, the gospel text challenged us in the words of Philip of Bethsaida, to invite people saying, ***Come and see!*** I don't know whether you have tried this approach. If you have, it may have failed because you need to have the right tools, the right methodology. A fisherman uses nets of different sizes, hooks of different sizes and sometimes drag-nets. Merely saying "***Come to our church and see***" may not be enough to fill this church with worshippers. You ought to:

- have the **know-how!**
- use some kind of **social psychology,**
- **employ the right methodology.**

When the Lord says, I will make you fishers of people -- in his mind he knows people aren't fish. And so should we! The business of fishing for people requires **custom-sized nets.**

One of the many techniques used in the business of recruiting people is knowing **how people function** -- **what people like** and **what people hate** -- **what attracts** and **what puts them off.** Understanding and practicing these skills are necessary for the making of disciples.

The Lord who sends us out does not give us the method. **The Lord** expects us to **be creative.** We must **use varied and relevant means of evangelism.** We are not to do as we have always done -- that one-sized net won't be helpful. We need to be clever as **serpents** but gentle as **doves.** Yes! We need this kind of wisdom in the ministry of fishing for people.

Are you ready? What size are your nets?

Are your tools custom-made or

are they one-size-fits-all?

Come follow me, says the Lord, ***and I will make you fishers of people.*** Will you fish for people on behalf of Jesus? Be the eyes, the ears, the feet, that will follow His vision. Shall we?

Amen.

