

Mark 1:14-20

Epiphany 3; January 25 & 26, 2014

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Have you ever heard one of those big fish stories? Isn't it amazing how the size of a fish can go from here (small) to here (big) in a moment of time? *"You should have seen the one that got away. He broke the line. He almost dragged overboard."* We've all heard *fish stories*. Perhaps, you have even told a fish story or two. Today's Gospel Lesson is a fish story. It is not an exaggeration or fairy tale. It is a story that everyone of us here this morning is part of. Therefore, let us follow Jesus and be fishers of men.

"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him." How could they do this? How could they just leave everything and follow Jesus? This wasn't the first time that they had followed Jesus. They met him when they were with John the Baptist way down the Jordan River. In fact, Andrew had been one of John the Baptist's disciples. He was there as Jesus approached John the Baptist, and John exclaimed: **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** Andrew ran and got his brother, Simon. They went and told two more men. They then listened to Jesus.

They had heard Jesus preach about how the kingdom of heaven is near so repent and believe the good news of a Savior come into the world. They were first of all fish, and Jesus caught them, and the Holy Spirit brought them to faith. And there's more. They had seen Jesus miraculously heal Peter's mother-in-law. They had seen Him change water into wine at a wedding in Cana. In fact, Luke's Gospel tells us that on the very day that Jesus called them to "follow," Jesus had miraculously given Peter a catch of fish so big that James and John had to help them bring in their nets. But they were still fishermen, who were followers of Jesus.

Mark picks up the account of Jesus' disciples some months later. Herod had put John the Baptist into prison. Andrew and Peter were still able to do some fishing when they got the chance. But things were about to change. Jesus has come to the Sea of Galilee with one purpose in mind: **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him."** They were now going to be focused on one thing – following Jesus and throwing out the net of the Gospel to catch more people. How could they do that? They had been caught by Jesus. The Holy Spirit had worked faith in their hearts. They had heard Jesus' message. They saw the miracles. So when Jesus called them to follow him, they knew what they were getting into. They were following the Messiah. Jesus preached repentance and people repented. They believed. They trusted the Good News that he brought them. Again and again, they had seen Jesus cast out the net and catch people to believe. They were "hooked" by him.

And so, they followed him. They followed him on the streets. They followed him in the mountains or the desert. They followed him when the crowds were large and increasing. They followed him as the crowds went away because this wasn't the Messiah they expected. They followed Jesus to the cross and the tomb. They followed him to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. They followed him till they saw him ascend into the sky.

Let's apply that to ourselves. It's important to remember that first of all we were fish. Jesus had to catch us first. That started with the water of baptism. (Later this morning, that will happen again here at the water of this baptismal font.) He will take that little child in his arms and say: You are mine! He calls you to repentance, and he assures you that your sin is forgiven – over and over again. He says to us that he will protect us. He will provide for us. He says: **"Come, follow me."** Put down your nets and follow me!

That is hard to do. It is hard to follow Jesus when the waves are crashing all around us. Peter tried it once: **"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."** **"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. **"You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"** It is hard to change my ways to follow Jesus in how I live my life. It is hard to keep Jesus the center of life because there are just so many things that seem to keep pushing him out. It is hard to do this fishing when you don't catch fish.

Simon and Andrew had spent days on the Sea of Galilee casting out their nets. Day after day they had done the same thing; the same sea, the same net, the same boat. Day after day it was wind, water, fish, sore muscles, tired bodies. Some days the boat came home full and some days it was empty. They kept fishing when the crowds were large following Jesus. They kept fishing when they were all falling away. Where did they find the strength to keep doing this? They found it in Jesus.

Where do we find the strength to keep fishing? The same place these disciples found it – Jesus. God calls us to cast the net out. He says that He will take care of the catching. He tells us to keep throwing the Gospel out there. That's how the Holy Spirit brings people into the net. Keep sharing it with your co-workers. Keep talking to your neighbors. Keep showing it in your words and actions. Keep encouraging. Keep following Jesus in your homes, in your work places, and every occupation you do.

You are a part of this *fish story*. Come, let's be fishers of men. Amen.