

“Jesus Makes Us Fishers of People”

This morning in our worship service, we’ve considered three different accounts of people being called into God’s service, specifically into the work of sharing his Word. Each one is unique as far as the people and the circumstances, and yet they all very clearly have many things in common. The first of these accounts concerned Elisha, in the Old Testament, who lived before 800 BC. Elijah, a major prophet at the time, came to him and indicated that God had chosen Elisha as his successor. And Elisha began working with and for a training under the supervision of Elijah. The rest of the story is that after God took Elijah to heaven, Elisha became a very prominent prophet, one we know a good deal about from the Bible.

We also heard about Saul or Paul, the one-time enemy of God and his people. Perhaps you recall how on the road to Damascus, where Saul was headed in order to arrest and harass Christians, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him, converted him, and told him of his plans for Paul’s future. In our lesson from Acts, we heard how God put those plans into action, instructing the congregation in Antioch to send off Paul and his colleague as missionaries. And Paul went on to become arguably the most famous and most influential missionary of all time.

Our sermon today is mainly going to focus on the third of these accounts. In the Gospel, Mark’s Gospel, we heard about how Jesus called four men to follow him, to learn from him and to be trained for their service, to be a part of his twelve apostles. And just like all of these accounts have much in common, so they also have application to our lives today. Our sermon text applies to us today because Jesus makes us fishers of people. And he does so by calling us and equipping us.

One of the similarities among all of the people in these accounts of calling is how surprising or unexpected each was. Paul’s is perhaps the most obvious, that God would call someone intent on destroying his church to actually build that church. But Elisha was busy working the field, and Simon, Andrew, James, and John were all working as fishermen. They had a job, a means of support, perhaps even a well-paying one. They weren’t particularly educated or otherwise suited to be preachers or teachers. They had a variety of personalities and temperaments. And yet God called them and used them to accomplish his purposes.

For the fishermen of our sermon text, Jesus called them right from their vocations. Simon and Andrew were actively casting their nets into the water trying to catch the fish that they needed. James and John were doing other important work, mending and preparing their nets for the next fishing opportunity. Jesus, walking along the shore, invited all four men to follow him, and they did, leaving everything behind.

You see, what was important in these exchanges was not the men that Jesus had selected, but the fact that Jesus had selected them. This work didn’t require any specific personality or temperament. It didn’t require that someone demonstrate their worthiness to be called. If it had, no one would have ever been called. Instead, the fact that Jesus called these men was evidence of his grace, his unmerited love. He was showing love to them, as he would train and strengthen them. He would allow them to learn and grow in their own faith and conviction. He would help them through challenges and difficulties. And he would deserve all the credit for the success with which he blessed them.

Do you see the application to your own life? Jesus has called you to faith in him. He has tenderly invited you to follow him, to learn from his teaching, to put your confidence in him as your Savior. This isn’t something that you earned. This isn’t something that you deserve because of who you are, or what you’ve done, or who you know, or any of the other reasons that we usually identify as reasons for success in this life. Jesus has called you to believe in him only because of his grace to you. He looked at you and saw a life full of sin, a person born from sinful parents, interested only in serving yourself. And he loved you in spite of all of that. He loved you not because of who you were or what you could become, but because he is loving and gracious and good and compassionate. And in his love, he called you to follow him. He called you to repent of your sins and to believe the good news that he is your all-sufficient Savior.

And he called you to do some very important work. Simon, Andrew, James, and John would spend their lives doing something new. Instead of their main vocation being fishing in the Sea of Galilee, they would become full-time fishers of people. They would share the same good news that they knew and loved with others. They would invite others to follow Jesus, just as he had first invited them. And even though opposition and danger were all around, even though other messengers had already been imprisoned for doing that same work, Jesus would lead these men to be the fishers that he called them to be, fishers of people, fishers of souls.

God still calls some people to be fishers of people in full-time ministry work. We tend to know them today as pastors or Christian teachers. In their case, too, the call is a gracious one, not based on their own merits or worthiness, but based on God's love to them. And he doesn't show up in person, stand in front of them, and speak out loud this invitation, not like he did for these disciples. Instead, God works through others who encourage young people to consider ministry work. He works through a conviction in a believing heart that wishes to share that faith with others and doesn't want any other job to take precedence over this sharing. No, not everyone is called to this sort of work, but it is worth considering whether this sort of work is something Jesus might have you do. It is worth thinking about and praying about people that you might know who could be pastors or teachers and encouraging them to consider it.

But just as important, it is worth considering the work that God calls all of us to do. No, not all Christians all full-time ministers, but all Christians are called by Jesus to be his witnesses. They are called—you are called—to be prepared to answer people who ask about your hope. You are called to let your light shine before others around you. You are called to share Jesus with others by your words and actions no matter what your full-time vocation might be. You are a fisher of people, because all of God's children are fishers of people.

You are a fisher of people because Jesus called you, and Jesus equips you for that work. The four men he called from their Galilean fishing boats would receive more than a year of intensive training with Jesus. He equipped them with what they needed to carry out their assignment. He does the same for you.

Jesus equips us by setting an example. Even before he called these men, he was at work preaching in Galilee. He was sharing the good news that God was now keeping his promises to carry out his salvation plan. Jesus called the people to turn away from their sins in repentance and to believe the good news that he was their Savior from sin.

His apostles and all of his witnesses since would proclaim the same message. An important part of the training that Jesus gave these men was teaching them this good news and all of its implications for them and for the world. In the same way, we are more and more prepared to share our faith as we dig deeper and study and learn this same good news. God has called us to repent of our own sins, to turn away from them, and to believe that Jesus is our Savior. In the same way we fish for people as we invite them to repent, to turn away from sinful ways, and to believe that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

See, Jesus is so much more than an example. When he proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near, he was proclaiming that he had come to be the Savior. The time had come, and in that very time God was keeping his promise. Jesus was making himself known as the Savior of the world; his Epiphany glory was being shown to all who would listen to his message. And not long after that, when the training course for his disciples was complete, Jesus carried his own cross to a hill where he suffered and died for the sins of the world. He became for the world the good news that he preached.

Over the years, God has called many to proclaim that same good news. Some he has enlisted in full-time service. Some have had other vocations. His witnesses have come from all sorts of backgrounds, and they have been all sorts of people. But they had this in common: Jesus called them by his grace and he called them to share that grace. He has done the same for me and for you. He has made us fishers of people.

The Text: Mark 1:14–20 (NIV84)

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.