

Sermon for Epiphany 3A
Sunday, January 22, 2023
“Fish for People”

Text: Matthew 4:12-23

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The setting of today’s gospel was a pivotal moment in Jesus’ life and ministry. It happened immediately after his baptism by John the Baptist, which we read about in last week’s gospel lesson, and was followed by his temptation in the wilderness that lasted forty days. Today’s gospel lesson begins picks up where we left: John the Baptist has been arrested. The forces of the Empire seemed to be in control, but Matthew quickly indicates that something new is about to take place. Jesus recalls the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which were proclaimed some 700 years earlier to excite the Israelites to revolt against the Assyrians, a foreign empire, who controlled the Canaanite regions that had been promised to Israel and given to two of his sons, Zebulun and Naphthali. Now, those same regions are again being controlled by another foreign empire—this time it’s the Romans—and Jesus offers Isaiah’s prophetic words of hope to let his people know that their savior has come: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who have sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.” Jesus is that light, and he is ushering in a new kingdom—the Kingdom of God—to replace the powers of men. John the Baptist represents the old, and mentioning his arrest, which would eventually lead to his death, is Matthew’s way of taking John out of the picture to clear the way for the ministry of Jesus and the ushering in of a new regime.

But this new regime is different. This new regime is God’s Empire and it will conquer, not by the power of a sword or by the might of an army, but through love, respect, and the commitment of people to join the fight. Jesus takes the message of repentance preached by John the Baptist, adopts it his own ministry, and will now take it in a new direction. Jesus recognizes that he can’t do this ministry alone, but with the help of others, in community. Jesus begins calling his main followers: first Andrew and Simon Peter, then James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus meets them where they are, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where they made their living as fishermen. Jesus calls them out of their occupation into vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin *‘vocare’* which means ‘to call.’ Jesus calls four ordinary men into something new and extra-ordinary. He calls four fishermen into a new life of service as warriors for the Kingdom of God, as fishers of people. Their battle cry will be the proclamation of good news to a people who lived in despair and longed for hope; who faced oppression and hungered for liberation; who were broken or sick and needed healing. “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.” And he did it with the help of his disciples.

We are the disciples of the current age. Christian discipleship calls us into new life in Christ in the here and now. Matthew’s spent a lot of time in his gospel recalling

how Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven; Jesus preached about that from the very beginning of his ministry. But, Jesus's proclamation that the kingdom of heaven is at hand is not confined to the past or anticipated for some future time or place; he said that the kingdom is present here and now. Jesus called ordinary men (and women) out of their occupation as fishermen into vocation as fishers of people. Jesus called them from within the context of what they knew best. We, too, are to be fishers of people, just like those first disciples, and we have been called to do ministry in the context of our own ordinary lives, and to do it in community. So, how will we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?

At All Saints Church we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord through our participation in the Eucharist, our oneness in fellowship and diversity, by respect for each other and through outreach in the community. That is our mission statement, and we are called to live that out as a community. We learn from each other and we support each other in the fight for God's kingdom. Every thing we do should tie into our mission statement in some way. We already do that in so many ways through our ministries. Now our bells are working again—one of them, at least—so the neighborhood hears our presence every hour during the day. And last week at the Annual Meeting, I called on our community to take our proclamation of good news to a new level. If you were here last week, you heard this already, and if you weren't you'll hear it now. I called on us to make a commitment to the formation of our young people in this church. I am looking for five people who will commit to this so that we can offer some type of instruction on Sundays. One Sunday each month will also be designated as "Youth" Sunday, where youth will participate in the mass in as many ways as possible. I'm going to push this even further and ask for two others with the energy and drive to start a youth group that will meet at least once a month to provide an opportunity for our youth of junior high and high school age to get together for fellowship, formation, and fun. And, I'm asking all ministries to intentionally reach out to our youth to be part of their ministry, because we need to start focusing on the legacy we will establish so that we can continue making a difference in peoples' lives for many years to come. I also proposed that we start another feeding program where we minister to the many homeless and needy people in and around our neighborhood by giving out a boxed lunch to those in need.

We must be proclaimers of the Kingdom to the world by showing love and respect, and by doing the things that will make our community and this world a better place. We are called to continue being fishers of people. We need to continue being, first and foremost, a spiritual place where anyone can come into this space, catch a glimpse of the divine, feel like they're a part of something special, and have their spiritual and emotional cups refilled for life in the real world.

As you leave today, think about how you will be a proclaimer of the kingdom of God here on earth. How will the light of Christ shine within you out among the heathen and the strong forces of this world? How will you fish for people? Amen.

Resources

SermonWriter, <http://www.lectionary.org/SW/01-26xo/Matt.4.12-23.htm>

The Working Preacher, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3018>

The Working Preacher, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3138

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