

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles – ¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time, Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and Jesus called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis, and he cured them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and even from beyond the Jordan.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 4:12-25

01/25/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Leaving Our Nets In Order to Become Nets"

Rev. Amy Terhune

"There is a ridiculous old story about a fisherman who was enormously successful. Each morning, he would take his small boat out on the lake and within a few hours he would return with a boat loaded with fish. People wondered, how did he do it?

"One day a stranger showed up and asked the man if he could go along the next time he went out fishing. The man said, "Sure. Meet me here tomorrow morning at 5:00 and we will go out."

"So, the next morning the two of them made their way through the early morning mist to a small cove where the fisherman stopped the boat and cut off the motor. The stranger wondered where the man's fishing equipment was. He had no rod and reel. All the stranger saw was a net and a rusty tackle box.

"The man pulled the tackle box over to himself, opened it, and took out a red stick of dynamite. Taking a match, he lit the fuse of the dynamite, held it for a moment and heaved it into the water. There was a terrific blast. Then the fisherman dropped his net and began filling up the boat with all the fish that floated to the surface.

"After watching this, the stranger reached into his hip pocket and pulled out his wallet and flashed the badge of a game warden. Somberly he said, "What you've done is extremely dangerous. You're under arrest."

"This didn't seem to rattle the fisherman in the least. He reached into the tackle box, pulled out another stick of dynamite, lit it, held it for a moment while the fuse burned on down, then handed it to

the game warden. "Now," he said, "Are you just going to sit there or are you going to fish?" [6 ¶s from illustrations, www.Sermons.com.]

With all due respect to the game warden, I imagine Jesus asking us the same question this morning. Are you going to sit there or are you going to fish? Because fishing is what we're supposed to be doing. Fishing for people. There's a part of me that has never been entirely comfortable with that particular image for evangelism. Maybe it's because my gut impulse is to analyze it a little too literally. After all, I know what happens when one goes fishing. I cast a line out into the water with bait on it. Some poor unsuspecting fish bites the lure and is reeled up out of the water—it's natural habitat—to flop around in agony on the dock until all the life is gone from the thing. That's a lousy model for evangelism. Remember, the word Evangelism, regardless of how its interpreted today, when used in scripture comes from the fusing of two ancient Greek words. εὖ (*yoo*) meaning good, and ἀγγέλιον (*angelos*) meaning messenger. Together it means "good message" or "good news". That all that evangelism really is – it's sharing good news about who Jesus is and what how he redeems human life. Jesus doesn't leave us gasping on the dock. He actually puts us back into our natural habitat – into God's presence. 17th century theologian Blaise Pascal once wrote that there is a void within each of us that we try to fill with many things, but it can only truly be filled with the Spirit of God. Evangelism is one person introducing another to that Great One who will fill that void. You don't have to go door to door. You don't have to have an elaborate testimony. You don't have to speak in tongues. All you need to evangelize is a willingness to tell someone about the One who gives you life and love and purpose.

And that's really what happens in our lesson this morning. Peter, Andrew, James, and John are fishermen. Presumably, they went out at dawn to fish, they've returned, cleaned up the catch, and are mending their nets or whatever. They're literally minding their own business when along comes Jesus. "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people," he calls to them. And Matthew reports that they "immediately" dropped everything and followed.

Wow! I like to think that if Jesus walked along and called my name, I'd drop everything and follow, too—but then again, Jesus has been a living presence in my life for a long time. Keep in mind that to this point in Matthew's gospel, Peter, Andrew, James, and John haven't had that advantage. They haven't heard choirs of angels in the night sky over Bethlehem or followed a star from a far-off land. They haven't witnessed a healing, or seen loaves and fish multiply to feed thousands or experienced the sea going utterly still around them as a storm is subdued by the voice of Christ. They haven't seen anything yet! In fact, to the best of our knowledge, just based on the text as Matthew has written it, we don't even know that they knew who Jesus was! But when he walks along and calls them to follow, they do...immediately. Which is impressive! I mean, really, genuinely remarkable! Maybe there was something compelling in Jesus' voice, or his demeanor, or his eyes—something words can't capture—that explains how they're able to just go at the drop of a hat. Maybe there's more to the story—some prior experience with Jesus—and Matthew just doesn't tell us that part. Maybe their readiness is what made them fit apostles. I don't know. All I know is that while this telling demonstrates a truly spectacular leap of faith, it doesn't not strike me as normative. If you'll forgive the pun, it's a goodly fish to swallow, you know what I mean?

So, as we must always do with any scripture lesson we study, we must ask ourselves: what is the Word trying to communicate? Is this journalistic reporting—the facts, all the facts, nothing but the facts? Or is it something else? Well of course it is. You know there's more going on here. Matthew is indeed telling us something vital about how God calls us, but we only grasp it if we recognize that Matthew is not so much giving us a blow-by-blow report as he is giving us theological insight.

So, look with me at this lesson. Note that John the Baptist has been arrested. Jesus, recognizing that Jerusalem isn't ready for his message yet, takes the word out to the hinterlands. But

he's picked up where John left off. Repent! Which means a whole lot more than 'say you're sorry'. It literally means turn around, strike out in a new direction, open your mind, leave the old you behind, become a new creation. That's the invitation of Christ. And then he walks the shoreline, calling to a group of fishermen, "Follow me!" The point I want you to catch in all of this is that the action stays with Jesus. We can apply to a college, we can apply for an internship, we can apply for a job, a passport, a license. But we don't apply for discipleship. We are called to discipleship. It's a gift we receive from a gracious God. The action starts with God. Maybe you've heard it said that God doesn't call the equipped; rather, God equips the called. And that's true. So quit worrying about whether you're good enough. You're not. God doesn't call you because you're good enough. God calls you because you're his. And when we respond, God gives what we need. Every bit of it is a gift.

But here's the second thing I really want you to notice about this text. When Jesus comes along, he calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John amid their very normal, everyday activities. The call on their lives is not issued in the middle of a worship service or on the Sabbath at the synagogue. It's not at a leadership seminar or a quiet retreat. And it's not a booming voice from the sky. It comes while they're on the job, fixing their nets. And the language Jesus uses to call them is the language they know—fishing. Which I find to be a heartening thought. Jesus comes to us where we are, too. He speaks our language. He meets us in our circumstances. When I came to Christ, it wasn't a preacher or a great leader that drove the message home. It was my youth director – someone with a real gift for talking to teenagers. He wasn't eloquent or fiery. He was himself. He was authentic, and that is what made the difference.

But I want to push that one step further: God did meet them where they were at, in their normal work. But God didn't let them stay where they were at. Mind you, it's not like they were just sitting there twiddling their thumbs when Jesus came along. They weren't! They were working. They had stuff to do. And you can be sure that other people's lives may have depended on what they were doing—wives, kids, parents, coworkers. We know Peter had a mother-in-law, which means he had a wife. We know James and John worked with their father. So, we know that when Jesus appeared on the beach that day, he disrupted a lot of lives. Do not miss that!

God called: Leave your nets. Your safety nets. Your nets of self-sufficiency. Your nets of comfort of comfort and convenience. Your nets of well-laid plans. Leave it all behind. And become nets yourselves. It's hardly convenient. Matthew wants to make that clear to his audience. God's call disrupts things. Some disruptions are more earth-shaking than others, but you can be sure that following involves a certain amount of risk.

Think about it. A Sunday school teacher comes home from work, makes dinner, maybe helps the kids with homework, or has a pile of dishes on the counter, or basket full of dirty sheets and towels waiting to be washed. And in between all the other stuff that has to get done, he or she sits down with the material and figures out a lesson plan for Sunday morning. It's a disruption! Somebody else just got home from work, they haven't even got dinner in the oven yet when their young neighbor next door calls distraught because the pipes have frozen and they don't know what to do. Instead of quiet night, they spend the evening holding a hairdryer and mopping up water. It's a disruption! Maybe another is at work, with piles of paperwork waiting to be done, and a coworker shows up the door asking for a minute to talk. And you know that coworker doesn't want a minute—he wants 45 minutes. But you put away the paperwork and you listen. It's a disruption! You have an opportunity to take a job that will fulfill you and make you happy, but the salary is \$20K less than what you're making now. It's a disruption! Yesterday, a man on the street in Minneapolis was out filming what's happening in his city. He helped a woman who had fallen and wound up being shot 9 times for his trouble. And some of you will be mad that I mention it, but I have to because it breaks my heart that we can't seem to

disrupt the entrenchment that is dividing families and neighborhoods. But even more, it breaks my heart that saying I'm heartbroken over violence and death and division is a polarizing statement. So, excuse me for the disruption. But ministry happens in disruptions. If we're looking for God to fit neatly and comfortably into our plans and expectations, chances are, we'll miss it—miss the chance to love and be loved, miss the chance to make a difference, miss the chance to encounter the living God. Thank God for disruptions! They are moments of grace in disguise. They are invitations to get involved in what God is already doing.

A call is a gift. It meets you where you are. But it's a disruption. It takes you out of your comfort zone. It propels you further. I'm going to close this morning by relaying an experience of Rev. King Duncan, editor of *Dynamic Preaching*. Let him tell it in his own words:

"I was getting dressed one Sunday morning to speak at old First Church—a high-steeple church with a rich history. The radio was on. The early morning service from a fast-growing Pentecostal church was being broadcast. I knew the pastor. He is not a great preacher—a little too emotional for my liking. But he knows how to reach people no one else can reach.

"As I straightened my tie, I heard him say, 'Before we begin this morning, I want to say a couple of things to you. First of all, I want to say that there is far too much moving around in the service while I am preaching. It's distracting.' I thought that was a rather amusing thing for him to say on radio. Then he added, 'And another thing. I would appreciate it if you would wait till after the service is over to go out to the restroom.' I thought to myself, 'Is he really saying this on radio?' Then to make matters worse he added, 'I have to wait till the service is over to go to the restroom and so can you!' I let out a hearty laugh. Who would say that in a worship service being broadcast on the radio? Smugly I finished tying my tie and laughed inwardly about this unsophisticated messenger of the Gospel.

"Then the voice of God spoke to my heart. 'King,' God said, 'the reason that pastor has to tell his people how to behave in church is that a year ago many of them were not in a church. Some of them were having serious problems with alcohol and drugs. They were prostitutes and pimps. They were gang members and troubled kids and marginalized people. They were in crack-houses and half-way houses and jail cells. they don't know how to act in church because they've never been to church until just recently.' Then God said, 'Don't worry, King, you won't have that difficulty at old First Church.'" And I thought to myself, 'God help us, we won't. Everybody at old First church will know exactly how to behave in church.' And I couldn't help thinking that might be the most tragic thing that can be said about any congregation'." [3 ¶s adapted from "How Do You Act in the Presence of the Queen?" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

Well, folks, we're a lot more like old First Church here than we are like that church on the radio, aren't we? Evidence seems to suggest that most of you know how to behave in church. This, in itself, isn't a problem. The question is, would we, could we, welcome one who doesn't know how to behave in church? Those folks that had no idea how to behave in church—they had left behind everything to follow. To be sure, most of them left behind destructive habits, dead-end lives, and hopeless downward spirals. Their entire way of life shifted radically. Has ours? Do we dare assume that because our lives are not as marred by so many bad decisions, that we have no destructive habits, dead-ends, or downward spirals to leave behind? I think not. There is a world around us, a neighbor, a student, a friend, a coworker, somebody in our lives that needs good news – that needs our empathy, our hope, our encouragement, our companionship on the journey. This is what it means to fish for people.

And so, the question we started with still hangs there. God is calling. Right here in your imperfect life. Are we going to just sit there? Or are we going to fish? Amen.