

Dropping Our Nets

(Matthew 4:12-23)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 26, 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our creator, our sustainer and our redeemer. Amen.

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 fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.¹

Ministry – both the ministry of the ordained and of the laity – requires tenacity. Regardless of the obstacles that appear in the path on which we may feel God has set us ... no matter how difficult things may get or how often we may think, “I’m tired; I just can’t do this anymore” ... we have to keep going. The life of a 1st century fisherman also required tenacity: casting and re-casting nets into the water; hoping for a good catch and working even harder when the catch was bad; working against bad weather and the elements; hauling the catch into the boat and navigating to shore; mending the nets; starting over the next day.

So when Jesus walked by and saw Peter and Andrew casting a net, did he see in them the tenacity that he knew would be required of his followers? Did he see in them the willingness ... the **drive** ... that would be required to cast and re-cast their nets into a society that would often yield a bad catch and contained a different type of element against which they would need to contend? Even beyond that, I wonder how long Jesus may have stood and watched the two brothers as they went about their work. The only sense of timing we have is Peter and Andrew’s response to the call: it was **immediate**. But we don’t know how much time elapsed between Jesus **seeing** them and Jesus **calling** them.

When they were called, it may have been that the words of the prophet Jeremiah flashed through their minds: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”² Perhaps the swiftness with which they put down everything and started down the road with Jesus was an indication that they already knew a bit about him; perhaps they had heard some bits of gossip or stunned news about him as it passed through the countryside.

At the end of the day, though, Jesus called ... and Peter and Andrew answered by “abandoning their livelihood.”³ They set aside their jobs and accepted the call to a new vocation. No longer

¹ Matthew 4:18-20 (NRSV).

² Jeremiah 1:5 (NRSV).

³ W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann. *Matthew*, note 20, p. 40.

would they work to fill the stomachs of humanity; from that day forward, they worked to fill their **souls**.

God has a call for each one of us. It might be a call to change something minor, or it might be a call to something completely new and incredible. Perhaps that call comes in the voice of someone else, a voice asking you to join in a ministry ... or a voice asking for your participation ... or a voice pleading for your help. The call could come in the sheer stillness that Elijah experienced at the mouth of the cave on Mount Horeb. It could come, as it did with me, in feeling as if I was being tapped on the shoulder.

The call could come out of a bush that burns but is not consumed. It could come as a voice from the heavens or a whisper right next to us. It could come as a rainbow arcing across the sky or a dove descending from on high. As we learned in recent weeks, it could even come in the form of a dream. Regardless of its source ... no matter where the call may come from ... ask yourselves this: *How **quickly** will I respond?*

Some of you may have already heard God's call to you. Others of you may still be waiting, wondering when it will be your turn. Regardless of your situation and regardless of whether you think God has whispered to you or tapped you on the shoulder, there's one thing I believe: calls from God are **not** one-time events. I believe calls from God come over and over and over again. Consider Peter, for instance; when Jesus summoned him that day, that was not his one call. For the rest of his life and as we see throughout the Gospels, the call he received was ongoing. He was called to follow and to lead. He was called to tear down and to build up. He was called to proclaim and preach. He was called to heal and teach. On his last day, he was even called to a cross in Rome.

Peter was called not seven times, but seventy times seven times ... and each time, he answered. When **you** are **called, will you answer?** When you are called to some aspect of life here at this church – our mission and liturgy, our worship and learning, our reaching out and lifting up – **what** will **your answer be,** and how **quickly** will you give it? In the world beyond this place – in this community and county, among your family and friends and coworkers – when you sense a call to something new, **what** will **your answer be,** and how **quickly** will you give it?

Peter and Andrew were seen and called, and every one of us is seen and will be called. Every one of us has something to offer in this life: to those we know and love well and those we haven't yet met; to all who come here and all to whom we may be led; to those who feel uplifted and those who need to be lifted up. When your call ... when **every** call ... comes, how quickly will you drop your net and follow Jesus?

Amen.