

2023 01 22 – Fishers of People

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23 (The Inclusive Bible)

When I lived in Nunavut, one of my Inuit friends invited me to go fishing with her family. It was late May so the ice was still thick in the bay, but cracks had started to form creating natural holes for ice fishing. We didn't have augers, or poles or fancy reels, just a short stick with a string wrapped around it and a weight & hook at the end of the string. We stood there at the crack in the ice for a couple of hours, waiting for the fish to bite. Some nibbled at the bait, and I did manage to land a few, but mostly fish too small to eat. In fact, I don't remember cooking or eating any of the fish that I caught. But I will never forget the view of Clyde River from the bay and the icy fog that started to roll in as we headed back to town on our snowmobiles and sleds. That was one my first experiences with fishing.

How many of you have ever gone fishing on a lake or river or stream? How many of you love fishing and fish whenever possible? Have you ever thought about why people go fishing? Let's see if we can name a few of the reasons. (wait for answers: job, for food, to be in nature, for peace, to be on the water, to spend time with family & friends, to connect with the sacred, for a challenge/thrill) There are lots of reasons, aren't there? Henry David Thoreau said, "Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

In today's scripture reading Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee and encounters a couple of fishermen. Jesus has returned to Galilee following his baptism in the Jordan and his time in the desert or wilderness. The author of the

Gospel of Matthew explains that Jesus heard of his Cousin John's arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem and so decided to begin his ministry in Galilee, specifically in Capernaum, a town on the shores of lake we call the Sea of Galilee. It was in this place, that Jesus saw Simon and Andrew casting a fishing net into the sea. They were fishermen by trade; they fished to earn an income to support their families. Jesus, using a metaphor that they would understand, says to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of humankind."

Jesus is calling these brothers to a new way of living, a new vocation. He is asking them to leave their jobs, their families and to follow him. We have all heard stories of people hearing God's call and having that call result in a drastic change in their lives. Those of us who are clergy love to share our own "call stories."

But that's not the only type of call that Jesus makes on behalf of God. In fact, earlier in this passage, we read, "From that time on, Jesus began proclaiming the message, "Change your hearts and minds, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Change your hearts and minds." The New Revised Standard Version of the bible uses the term "repent" instead. As Jesus begins his ministry, he is calling the people of Galilee to a new relationship with God. He's saying, "God is waiting, all you have to do is repent, turn, change your heart and mind and accept the love that is already there."

In his blog this week, Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote about God's love in this way:

When you're young,
and your heart falls for that special one,
you daydream about them, don't you?
You notice them out of the whole crowd.
You watch, you know their routine.
You plant yourself, casually as you can
right where you know they come out of class,
or go to work, right up that sidewalk
as they come the other way—
you do it more than once—
so you can just happen to bump into them,
even for a fleeting conversation,
and maybe more, oh you hope,
a little more.

So the Beloved haunts your ways,
hoping for a brief encounter,
hoping, oh, hoping
for maybe a little more.
<https://unfoldinglight.net/>

It's as if Jesus is acting as God's wingman. He's calling us to notice those brief encounters with the Divine, the Holy Mystery and to maybe offer a little more, to change our hearts and our minds, to repent and to turn to the Essence of Love.

When we think about God calling us, we usually assume that we are being called to "do something." Think about all the different tasks that we could be called to do: to preach, to teach, to witness, to read scripture, to heal, to provide care, to seek justice, to feed the poor, to visit, to be a committee member, to greet or usher, to cook, to clean, to repair, to budget, to set up tables and chairs. There are so many things that need doing in this church of ours, in our community and in our world.

But what if God's call is more about being than it is about doing? What if fishing for people is kind of like fishing on the water? As we have already determined,

most of us are out on that river, or lake or ocean to be more than we are to do. We are there to be with ourselves, to be with our companions, to be with creation and to be with the Sacred. David Lose, a Lutheran pastor wrote:

God's call isn't simply to do something, but rather to be something, a [beloved] child of God. Maybe being comes before doing. Maybe being even makes doing possible.

<https://www.davidlose.net/2017/01/epiphany-3-a-being-before-doing/>

I'm thinking that Simon and Andrew, and probably even James and John had already heard Jesus speak. They heard Jesus' message of God's love and they were already starting to change their hearts and minds. So when Jesus came to the lakeshore that day, they were already God's beloved children. By opening themselves up to a relationship with the Sacred, they had also prepared themselves for the next step in their journey as disciples. They were ready to not only be, but also to do.

I know in my own personal journey, I spent several years connecting with God and with the congregation of Bellefair United Church before I was ready for a much more dramatic change in my life. Knowing that we are loved is the first step in being able to love and serve others.

This is true for us as individuals and also true for us as a congregation. That's why we need to know who we are called to be as a community of faith before we can figure out what we are called to do. We already a set of values, a mission statement and an even an affirming vision statement. We believe that God is

calling this congregation to be a place of acceptance, inclusiveness, spirituality, hospitality, respect, and social justice. Our mission statement says that “We, at First United Church, are called by the spirit to be a caring community of faith actively pursuing spiritual growth and compassionate outreach.” That is who we are called to be and therefore every action we take, every decision we make is grounded in that statement of identity and mission.

Yes, like Simon and Andrew, we are called to be “fishers of people,” to reach out into our community and into the world with care and compassion. But first we are called to be in relationship with the Sacred and to be in relationship with each other and with creation. This is why we worship, why we study, why we gather together around a table to break bread and to drink from the cup. We do this to allow the love of God to permeate our individual and communal soul. We do this to follow God’s call to be and to do. May it be so. Amen.