

Called To Follow, Born To Fish

Texts: Isaiah 9:1-4

I Corinthians 1:10-18 (Series A. 3rd Sunday after Epiphany) Psalm 27:1, 4-9

Matthew 4:12-23

Let us prayer:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness ~ on them light has shined. [Isaiah 9:2] Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen.
Amen.

We all know those times in this life when even the smallest amount of good news feels like a tiny ray of light in the darkness bringing a glimmer of hope that things will get better. Isaiah and the Psalmist, and a reminder in Matthew of the words of Isaiah that the Light is always there even when we feel lost and are sinking in the shadows.

The Psalmist asks if the *Lord* is our *light and our salvation whom shall we fear?* In our everyday reality, of course, we do have fears and worry and anxiety about many things in our lives and it is in such times that we are to try to summon even a vague intention to seek God's face. Looking for that wee beam of light with a fragment of faith and a bit of faint hope we are able to begin to take a shaky step forward into the always unknown.

Many, many times in the bible we are told that Jesus went the seaside with his disciples, that he got into their boats, that he told them where to lay their nets, and when to haul them in. And whenever he went fishing with his disciples they always caught a lot of fish.

When Jesus asked his first disciples to be his disciples he talked to them about fishing - saying to them - "follow me, and I will make you fishers of people". Ever since then that has been the primary image of what it means to be a follower of Jesus - that each of us is called not only to accept the love that Jesus has for us and to follow him - but to do what Jesus did – and help him to bring people into the Kingdom of God - which is symbolized by a boat.

Jesus asks us all to fish for people: to bring those who are lost and lonely - those who are sad - those who are looking for a better way of life - all those people swimming around in lakes and oceans looking for a new kind of life - into the church, into the boat - into a personal relationship with him where they can have all the good things that God wants to give them - and in turn - 'catch' and bring others into the boat - so that they might have what we already have and so that eventually the whole world might be a good and wonderful place - a place where no one is ever killed for what they believe and all people love one another in the way that Jesus loves us.

So today the boat and the nets are here to remind us of who we are – and what it is God wants us to do. We fish for people - when we love them like Jesus loves us and are not afraid to tell them about his love and his goodness - how he died for them so that they might live forever. The Gospel text reminds us about who we are and what we are about as we worship God this beautiful Sunday.

Many of years ago, in Ada Foah, Ghana I lived in a fishing village on the Gulf of Guinea. It is a marvellous place for my ancestors and it belong to my tribe, it looks out upon the grey seas of the Atlantic Ocean. It has been a fishing village for my people, for hundreds of years, if not thousands of years.

The Atlantic Ocean - and in particular the South Atlantic - is not the friendliest ocean in the world. Yet, despite the risks, that this area of the ocean poses, the fishermen of Ada Foah have gone out to sea - generation after generation in dugout canoes - and have found and caught an incredible abundance of fish.

But the fishermen of Ada Foah have known hard times before. For the most part the ones who have been born to fish - continue to fish - in the midst of difficulties. And most of these fishermen:

- even when they have passed the age when other people retire
- and even when they themselves have sold their boats or passed them along to their children, continue to fish, at least part time and to go where the fishermen gather.

I witnessed as a young boy the older ones helped mend nets and there they tell stories about fishing in the past, stories about the times when the nets came up empty trip after trip after trip about the times when the teller had barely ventured out towards the great sea and their nets were full to its breaking point and their arms and legs - their whole body tired out just from the pulling of them.

Stories about storms and the fear they have had, losing fellow fishermen at sea. And stories about the ocean when it is smooth as glass as the stars and the moon shine so brightly at night that it seems almost to be day.

When Christ called the first disciples he set them a task - the task of being fishers of men /women. "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, I will make you fish for people."

Simon Peter and Andrew - and later James and John could relate to the image even if they didn't understand exactly what Jesus meant by it. They were already fishermen. Like many of the fishermen in Ada Foah they had been at it for generations, they were born to it - and they lived to do it - till their dying day.

They knew that in the end - fishermen fish - no matter what. And they knew whether it be for salmon, or cod, or mackerel, or sardine or even for people, that fishing takes labour, and it takes thought, and it takes prayer.

And they knew that there is no life like it. "Follow me", Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of people" My friends, that too is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus, that is what we are called to do as ones who have longed to know the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven and have heard and seen the good news of that Kingdom's coming and have turned away from the things that destroy life and embraced the one who heals every disease of people.

That is what we are called to do - and that is what Jesus helps us do. In a spiritual way - when we begin to follow Jesus - we are born to be fishers - fishers of people.

That is what God wants us all to do and be. It's what Jesus did - in Galilee and in Samaria and in Jordan and Judea and Jerusalem, and it's what we are supposed to do in Montreal.

That is part of what our congregational mission statement is talking about when it says that we are a people - a place - who strive to live out our faith in the world. How do we do that? How do we fish for people? Well, the ways are many and are varied just as there are many different ways to fish.

But what net or rod, and what trout fishing and fishing for cod or setting traps for lobster have in common is a *purpose* and the actual doing of things to achieve that purpose. Our *purpose* is to catch people with the love that God gives us, and to bring those people to Jesus.

Purpose: Forgiving our enemies, blessing those who curse us loving those who hate us healing others even when we ourselves are wounded feeding others even when we have little or nothing to offer, doing justice - even when we ourselves are oppressed, loving mercy and doing kindness and all the while testifying to the one who makes it possible for us to do the impossible (*for who can really love his / her enemy and who can really bless those who curse him*) these are but some of the ways of fishing - some of the ways of being who Jesus says he will make us when we follow him.

So is providing a place for teaching children the ways of God and, so, is this building a place of worship and we come here to worship and to share with one another the goodness of God.

Providing clothing for those in need, food for those who hungry, a visit to those in prison, and opportunity for those who thirst for truth to find it in a place as well as in a people.

In the Kingdom of Heaven - and in the church which is the boat of Christ in this world - the fishermen not only receive a share of the catch, the catch itself begins to fish and multiply wealth for God and the people of God.

There is a miracle in the images suggested by this strange mixing of metaphors.

- We who are fish are turned into fishermen when we enter the kingdom of God,
- We who were lost and seeking to find a home become ones who bring others to our true and eternal home when we turn and follow Jesus.
- We who needed blessings are turned into ones who share the greatest of all blessings, the blessing of knowing Jesus and the new life he gives.

There is a great miracle in all this - the miracle of transformation, the miracle of God doing through us what we can't do on our own, the miracle of small things as the world counts them becoming great, and of great things as the world reckons greatness - becoming small.

How people are fished into God's Kingdom? according Church growth expects:

- By Advertisement **2%**
- By the Pastor **6%**
- By Organized evangelistic outreach **6%**
- But **86%** of the unchurched who respond to Gospel or church activities were brought in personally by friends, relatives, or someone else other than the *pastor*.

We who needed blessings are turned into ones who share the greatest of all blessings, the blessing of knowing Jesus and the new life he gives.

In our second lesson, Paul wrote to fishermen in Corinth, he wrote to the crew of that boat of Christ Jesus in that place to remind them of a simple and important fact. He reminds them that they were not called to form the Peter Group or the Apollos Party, or to become the disciples of Paul.

They were not called to become part of an in-group or an out-group. They were not called to become spiritual superstars in their own right or to point to others and say - that person is the best to follow.

He reminds them that they were called, and ministered to by Peter and by Apollos and by Paul himself to follow Jesus and to make Jesus the captain of their souls and the master of their destiny.

Paul writes to the Corinthians to remind them of their calling and of their mission and to remind them that everyone in the crew is important to getting the job done that everyone has a role to play if the fish are to be caught, if the kingdom of God is to be seen in them.

And he writes to them to remind them that the central fact of our faith is the *Cross* and that while that *Cross* is foolishness to those who are perishing, it is the power of God to those who are being saved.

That is the truth Paul was trying to remind the Corinthians. And that is the truth with which we are equipped by Christ as we, his church - his crew set forth day by day to fish for people.

It is wonderful to be able show and share with someone that God is ready and able to help them. It is wonderful to be part of a crew that works to show God's love and teach God's love to those in need. It is wonderful - and it is hard - and thrilling - and dangerous and just plain hard work at times.

Our little boat can get tossed about mightily in the storms of life. And our nets can come up empty so many times before we get a big strike. And when they come up full, well it is hard work to bring them in. But as my fishing folks in Ada Foah know - and fishermen of all places know - there is nothing like it.

There is nothing like doing what you have been born to do and knowing as you do it, and as you are sustained in the doing of it that the best is yet to come!

We are born to fish:

- born to share the good news,
- born to bring people to our captain and into his boat, his Kingdom so that they may know the love we know and receive the life that we ourselves are receiving the life that only our captain, our Lord, our Shepherd, our God and Father - can give, the life that is stronger than death.

And so it is here at St. Ansgar. As believers in Christ we are dedicated to Christian education and spiritual growth in a sharing, caring, and joyful atmosphere as we reach out to others in God's name and strive to live the Faith in the world.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then should I fear...Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. [Psalm 27:1a, 10]
May God help us as a congregation, and may God make each and everyone of us the 86% as his crew to fish— may God give us new dreams and visions to make it even more so day by day - till the Kingdom of God arrives in it's fullness. Amen.

January 22, 2023