

## “Fishing for People”

Matthew 4: 17-21

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We celebrated Easter last Sunday. Truly, Easter is about Jesus Christ, celebrating his resurrection, remembering God’s almighty power over death, and recalling God’s unending love for us. I am not trying to repeat the Easter story this morning, but I am still curious about a question: What if we were at Jesus’ empty tomb with Mary Magdalene and encountered Jesus, what would Jesus have told us and taught us to remember from his death and resurrection? If that is just one word, what will it be? This morning, I invite us to explore this question together.

Absolutely, there is no right answer for this question. You may choose a word such as ‘grace’, ‘salvation’, ‘happiness’, ‘courage’, or something else depending on your needs. I imagine a word, “**invitation.**” Jesus Christ wanted to pass on his spirit, passion and great vision to his followers. He hoped that his disciples would continue to work for the Kingdom of heaven. If you just want to remember the glorious resurrection as a supernatural and miraculous event, that is not the point that Jesus passed on. Easter is not only the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, but also it is Jesus’ personal invitation for us to follow him. That is it! Then, what does it mean to follow Jesus’ way?

In order to understand Jesus ministry and his vision, we need to set our time clock back to Jesus’ early public ministry time. Today’s scripture reading describes how Jesus called two brothers, Peter and Andrew as his followers. They were casting their net into the sea-because they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And then Jesus continued to call James and John in the same way. They were fishermen, too. These four fishermen were called to follow Jesus and they became the first four disciples. What attracted these men and changed their life direction?

When Jesus invited these four men to join into his ministry, he used a word, “fishing,” to describe his new ministry. I am fascinated by the word of *fishing* and an expression, “*fish for people.*” We know that Jesus was not a fisherman. Why did Jesus use this word for personal invitation to these fishermen? Let’s go further to explore the meaning of fishing. There may be some fishing experts in our congregation, if I am wrong, please correct me after service!!

People with fishing experience know that certain bait will attract a certain type of fish. For example, stink bait, a bread ball, or even a simple worm is a tasty treat for catfish. But if you want to reel in a bass, use a live minnow or a shiny spinner lure. To increase the odds for success, cast the minnow or lure toward the shore in the shallow water where bass feed. Successful fishermen know that one single style of bait is not effective for attracting all the different fish in a particular body of water. It takes a tackle box filled with a variety of baits, lures, and weights to land a good catch. Great fishermen do not only emphasize the good choices of baits, but they also emphasize the value of research like analyzing the local bodies of water and gathering information about current fishing conditions, such as what species of fish are biting, where, and on what bait. When Jesus approached these four fishermen, Jesus knew that fishing was not a hobby or sport for them, to them, it was their livelihood. They knew the best times and places to fish. They knew how to catch fish. Jesus invited them into his ministry and asked them to “fish for people,” to take all they knew about fishing and apply it to reaching people with the love of God.<sup>1</sup>

Just imagine how these fishermen would feel when they heard about Jesus’ personal invitation. It must be a surprising and unexpected call for them. The fishermen had been catching fish just for making their living, but they had never imagined their lives to serve others and fish for people using their gifts and talents. Literally, this would be a life changing experience. Jesus truly transformed their lives from ‘me-oriented life’ into ‘others-oriented life’. Jesus envisioned this kingdom of heaven by the love of God. This was what Jesus wanted to pass on to his followers.

Let’s go a little deeper to know the background of a fishing livelihood in Jesus’ time. The Sea of Galilee is a large freshwater lake, about 7 miles wide and 13 miles long. In the first century, the Sea of Galilee was also a well known harbor of fishing industry. Along the shore, villages were connected with the local fishing industry. Now Jesus was walking by this lake and he envisioned forming a new community. At that time, fishermen did not work in a “free market” economy. According to a social economic study, the fishing industry was state-regulated for the benefit of the urban political leaders. They were Greeks or Romans who had settled in Palestine following their military conquests, or they were Jews well-connected with King Herod and his sons. Everybody else was poor. Caesar and Herod benefited from the fishing trade in a variety of ways. Fishermen were at the bottom of a very detailed

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<sup>1</sup> Debi Nixon and Adam Hamilton, “Catch” A Church Program for Invitational Evangelism, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2012, p.21-22

economic hierarchy.

The fishermen's lives were oppressed, marginalized and they were outsiders. There was no joy of hope and excitement for the future. When they were in despair and remained hopeless, Jesus called them to dream a new dream bringing joy of hope by the love of God. Jesus wanted to have his disciples bring people in and help them experience God's transforming love. All of Jesus' messages and ministries were not given just for intellectual knowledge, but for transforming people's lives by the love of God. The spirit of Christian faith is all about proclaiming the good news and making a difference in our lives and in our neighborhood.

Jesus' invitation was simple and clear. We Christians are called to be change makers. Firstly, we are called to transform ourselves from an old being to a new being and secondly, we are also called to change our world to a better place. The world doesn't have to be our country, but it may begin with our neighborhood. I am not suggesting big changes. We can think big but begin with small things that we can do around us. I challenge us all to think about small things so that we can make a positive difference for our Fair Oaks community. Jesus Christ is inviting our church to be his disciple bringing a positive change and signs of hope to our neighborhood using our gifts and talents. Let us continue to envision and brainstorm what we can do together. Church should not be an island, but we are called to be a "bridge community" meeting the needs of our community.

Jesus is now calling each of us to respond and accept this invitation from him to join his ministry like the four fishermen. As the Bible confirms, the four fishermen immediately left their nets and followed him. I hope that we will accept Jesus' invitation and follow him as his disciples for the transformation of this world. Amen.