

## Wesley United Methodist Church

January 22, 2017

“Letting Go of Our Nets.”

Matthew 4:12-23, Isaiah 9:1-4,

Did they have any idea what they would get themselves into? Peter, Andrew, James and John had no crystal ball that day when Jesus called them. When the call came, they were going about business as usual: casting nets, pulling them back in, sorting and salting fish, taking them to market and maintaining their equipment. However it was that they became fishermen, they had not chosen an easy profession. Yes, I've seen the bumper sticker: “A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work.” These four men were not fishing for fun and recreation. They were not nestled into a drifting boat on a smooth pond. They didn't have their caps pulled down over their eyes with a pole resting in the crook of their arms. Their call did not occur on a lazy day with plenty refreshments in the cooler. These men did hard work. Their muscles ached from throwing and hauling the nets. Their hands were cut from the sharp knives and fish spines. Of course, there was always the smell. Fishing was a stable and profitable occupation. They were not rich, but they were not dirt poor, either. They made a good living, but it certainly wasn't glamorous.

Jesus called them from that life. They knew what they were leaving, both the pros and cons. They didn't know what Jesus was calling them to. We have the advantage of knowing how things turned out. We know the joys and wonders in store for them. We know they will see and experience things they could not imagine on the first day. They saw miraculous healings. Would it be worth leaving everything behind in order to see a paralyzed man walk away? (Matth.9:2-8). To see a little girl raised from the dead? (Matth. 9:25). We know that they heard intriguing parables. What would we give up to hear Jesus say to us, “to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven”? (Matth. 13:11). What would that kind of spiritual insight be worth? How much of a pay cut would we endure in order to see the power, intensity, and energy of the Transfiguration, as Peter, James, and John saw? (Matth. 17:1-8). Responding to Jesus' call opened up for these four men a spiritual adventure they never could have found on their own. What decision would the men have made if they had known everything? Would they have considered the miracles, the parables, and the presence of Jesus worth the cost? Accepting Jesus' call put them at risk. John has been arrested. Danger lurks behind the scenes in Jesus' call. Would they have responded so readily if they had known about the Garden of Gethsemane or the crucifixion? What would James have done if he had known that Herod would have him beheaded? (Acts 12).

The way Matthew presents this call scene, not one of them hesitated for a second. In the Gospel of John, the first disciples take some time to respond to Jesus. John the Baptist announces boldly to them who Jesus is. The would-be disciples check out Jesus' living quarters. They have a chance to think it over (John 1:29-42). The way Matthew presents the call, we aren't even sure these four know who Jesus is. The emphasis on Matthew's gospel is on how much we don't know when we respond. Matthew seems to want us to know that we really are taking a leap into the dark when we respond. Some of us may like John's gospel a little better. We receive some assurance of who Jesus is and we can take a little time to decide. The emphasis in John's gospel is important. We don't want to follow blindly some cult leader or crook. We need John's emphasis on getting some things straight and taking some time. Matthew is right, though. No matter how much we study up, or how carefully we make our decision to follow Jesus, we won't know what lies ahead of us when we respond.

Not only do the four men leave quickly when Jesus calls him, but they leave everything behind. Even though fishing was hard work, it was their livelihood. They had invested time in learning the trade, acquiring fishing rights, procuring boats and equipment. A person doesn't become a successful commercial fisherman overnight. In both cases, Jesus calls the new disciples in the middle of an important activity. Simon and Andrew had just cast their net. Apparently, they did not even wait to pull the net back in one last time. Matthew says they responded immediately. They don't even cash in that day's profits. James and John are mending their nets as they hear the call. They are preparing for their next expedition. They are looking to the future. The way the scene reads, if Jesus had called golfers, he would have called them when they were at the top of their back swing. We don't know what went through their minds, but they let go of their nets.

We don't know what the four disciples thought, but we know some things about what Matthew thought of Jesus' mission. Jesus came to bring light to those who sat in darkness. Part of that darkness was political oppression. Isaiah had talked about the darkness caused by the Assyrian domination. Now it was the Romans doing the oppressing. Part of that darkness was hopelessness. Part of that darkness was illness. Part of that darkness was spiritual depression and anguish. Jesus came to bring light into the darkness..... Jesus came to bring the dominion of heaven near. Jesus brought a sample of what it will be like to be in God's full presence, to experience true justice and fairness where everyone has enough, to

live in joy. In Jesus, God has reached into our world to bring hope. For Matthew, being part of that ministry was worth letting go of our fishing nets and leaving our old life behind.

Jesus continues to call disciples. We are not always called to leave our jobs or our security to follow. Many people leave high-paying jobs to do a ministry that pays a fraction of what their old job paid. We are not called to do that, but we are called to let go of our nets and follow Jesus.

Sometimes the nets we let go of are jobs and careers, but we hold on tightly to other nets. I'm not sure what to say about James and John leaving their father in the boat. They left him to carry on the family business while they followed Jesus. I have known people who neglected their families for church work. It was not always the best decision. I have known people who found a way to do church work and spend time with their families. Taking care of families can be our ministry. If family is your net, search your heart about what it means to follow Jesus. One other net we hold on to is a feeling of inadequacy. "I can't do that, I can't chair a committee; I wouldn't know where to begin." It's true that we should seek out where we can serve most effectively, but God's call can stretch us in ways we hadn't expected. Another net we hold on to is a bad experience from the past. We tried a ministry and it didn't go well. We experienced deep frustration. We vowed never to try that again. Sometimes the mistakes of the past are the building blocks of our later success. Maybe God can work through the pain of past experiences to bring real fruit from our next attempt.

When we let go of our nets, we carry on the ministry of Jesus. Verse 23 of this passage describes Jesus' ministry as teaching, proclaiming, and healing. We teach in Sunday School, in VBS, and in quiet conversations. We proclaim when we announce our faith to the world. We proclaim when we declare our values are not the same as the world's values. We are not ruled by money, success, or prestige. We resist violence, greed, and exploitation. We heal when we take care of one another in time of sickness, grief, or trouble. We heal when we pray for one another.

We don't always know what will happen when we respond to God's call. We know that God is with us and that he will work through our ministries, even our shortcomings and incomplete successes. If God calls us, let us drop our nets and respond. Let us shine the light of God into the darkness of the world. Amen.