

Mark 1:14-20

When we think about going fishing, we may envision a day of relaxing in a boat on a river or lake catching fish. But our understanding of fishing during Jesus' time on earth paints a very different image. We are told in our gospel passage for today, that Simon, his brother, Andrew; James, and his brother, John; are fishermen. But theirs is not the fishing of two brothers who will be relaxing on a lazy, summer day. Their day will be a day of hard work.

In Jesus' time on earth, fishermen had to be strong and sturdy. They used casting nets, typically ones that were weighted around the edges, so that when they threw the net into the water, it would sink. The net was woven from grass, flax, or a similar substance, and when the fishermen decided to haul it in to draught the fish, there were ropes they could pull to help trap and enclose the fish within the net.

This is a very different picture than a relaxing day at the river or lake. Yes, there are some similarities between the two fishing images. They would have gotten up early (knowing the habits of the fish), with the hope of catching more in the early part of the day. They would have tried to determine the best location, and they would have needed a lot of patience! But for Simon and Andrew, James and John, this was to be a day of hard work casting the net, draughting, sorting, salting and preparing the fish to take to market; a process that they would repeat over and over throughout the day.

This is what it is to fish for fish. But, what does Jesus mean when he says to the fishermen by the Sea of Galilee, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" (vs. 17, NRSV).

As Christian believers, we know that Jesus is calling them to be his disciples, to learn about God, to work with him, to gather people for God's kingdom, to use their ethic of hard work and patience to help others, and to use their spiritual gifts and skills for God's work in the

world.

Our scripture passage for today provides insight into what it means to "fish for people." Per Richard Horsley, "The whole of Mark is an expansion of Mark [verses]14-15," which state: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.' The task of the people of Israel is clear. The people are called to repent, return to God's way, believe the good news, and accept the message."

In the Roman Empire, John's proclamations (the reason for his arrest) and Jesus' preaching (which eventually led to his arrest and crucifixion) went against the cultures of the day--the philosophies of the Hellenistic world, the loose morals of the culture, the hypocrisy of the Jewish scribes and pharisees, Roman rule and the system of patronage, and the kingdom and kingship of the Roman Emperor.

How might we compare what was going on during Jesus' time on earth to the present day? Do we find similar examples in the world's systemic problems, including abuses of power, privilege, and patronage; the many "isms" that separate us one from another, white supremacist and other exclusionist organizations, and more?

In a recent news report, Chris Coons, a senator from Delaware, talked about the pandemic of COVID, and the pandemic of division and mistrust that is present in our country. We may think...isn't one pandemic more than enough for us to deal with right now? Why are some persons encouraging divisiveness and mistrust at a time when we so desperately need to focus on justice, peace, and unity? Not justice as seen in the malicious, violent behavior of vigilantes, but God's justice. Not the spewing of hate and hate-filled behaviors, but God's justice and peace. Not mudslinging, name calling, scapegoating, attacking others physically, or shooting

or murdering them, or any of the other hateful actions that draw us further apart. These are not the things that draw us closer to God's kingdom, where God's justice and peace reign. These are not the things that demonstrate our oneness as human beings created by God. Rather, these are things that continue to hurt, divide and separate us one from another.

Divisiveness is not unlike the sins of greed and envy. It is perpetuated by persons who do not want equality, who do not want unity, who do not want to share what they have with their neighbors. Divisiveness is encouraged by those who want to bask in their own glory; devaluing, demeaning, silencing and overpowering others in order to keep what they have for themselves! They do not see the need to share, they do not see the need to compromise, they do not see the need to help their neighbors in need, they do not see the need to do anything, but that which they want to do!

Yet, thankfully, thankfully, there are many in this country and world, who understand the importance of peaceful, nonviolent protesting, and safe, nonviolent ways to challenge injustices. Many of them are Christians who take their call to discipleship seriously. For God not only called the disciples almost 2,000 years ago, but God calls us today to further God's kingdom. We are called, each one of us! We are called to be God's disciples in a world that so desperately needs to hear the good news of God's kingdom, God's grace, God's peace, and God's love.

The message John and Jesus proclaim, is a message of repentance, because the people have been living in a mostly pagan culture and behaving in ways that are far different than God's ways. Jesus, the Anointed One, the Messiah, has come, and the behavior of the people of Israel is not in keeping with God's kingdom. Change is needed; change is necessary for the health and well-being of all; change for the better, change for the betterment of all people in God's world.

Per William Abraham, "repentance means a change of mind that leads to a change of

behavior. In repentance a person's intellectual and spiritual horizons are radically reshaped by the arrival of the kingdom, so much so that there is a change of heart and behavior." God the Father has sent Jesus the Son to carry out his promise to Israel. Jesus is proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom, and it is up to each and every person who hears his message to believe in him, trust in him, and share the good news. In this way, they too, can become disciples of God.

So, we return to Simon and Andrew, James and John being called to "fish for people," and Jesus' calling us to do the same. Perhaps our service as we "fish for people," will be relatively easy, comfortable, relaxing, like the fishing many of us are used to. But, perhaps, it will require hard work, great patience, and many prayers to God for strength, as we place our faith and trust in God and serve God in our daily lives. For as Christian believers, we receive God's grace and the possibility of eternal and everlasting life through Jesus' death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. As God's children through our one baptism, we are called to share the good news with others for their sake and for the sake of the world. We pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (The Lord's Prayer).

Simon and Andrew, James and John were called to be Jesus' disciples. They were called to, "fish for people." They were called to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and by so doing, to proclaim life over death. We who believe in God and God's word, who trust in Jesus' message, transfer that understanding to the present day and the present reality. We too, are called to share the good news with others. God is calling us to do God's work in the world. Let us be shaped for resurrection life by serving God, now and forever. Amen.