

Epiphany 3, Year B

The Rev'd Jon Spinillo

In the name of God who creates us, redeems us, and makes us holy. Amen.

Peace be with you from Winona, Minnesota and a very blessed third Sunday in Epiphany, beloved of God. In today's Gospel we are told the story of the calling of the first four apostles. Peter, Andrew, James, and John. One of the more interesting things about this morning's Gospel is that Jesus did not *ask* Peter, Andrew, James, and John, "Will you follow me?" Instead, Jesus simply *tells* them, "Follow me." It seems less about responding to a call or meeting a request and more like making a kind of holy dare; a holy wager.

But remember, it is the Gospels we're talking about so of course there is bound to be a twist and a turn. In this

story, the twist is that these guys don't really know Jesus. They don't have a history with him. Outside of what they have heard John the Baptist say about Jesus, they don't have much to go on and yet, Jesus says, "Follow me" and they follow him.

But why? Why follow Jesus? What motivated them? Scripture does not indicate that Jesus used any kind of supernatural or miraculous power during this event. **No fishermen were harmed or hypnotized in this Gospel.*

So what was it? What was it that made these men leave their professions and their family? Well, their dad anyway: "Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him."

It might sound a little counter-intuitive, but I do not think Peter, Andrew, James, and John's willingness to take this life-altering leap of faith was actually a result of anything

Jesus did or was doing at the time. It would be one thing if all the healings and casting-out of demons we hear about at the end of the chapter happened earlier right? The first four apostles' behavior would make a little more sense then, wouldn't it? First, Jesus does these works of power to prove he's legit, and then people follow. First he does something big (a miracle, a healing, a loaf and a fish from nothing, wine from water, etc.) and then they do something big in return. But that isn't how it goes down, is it?

The fact that it is very much *not* how the calling of the first apostles happens is one sign among many in the Scriptures pointing to the beautiful gracious truth that the Love of God is not transactional.

And remember, we're barely in Epiphany: The world, which had until then been asleep, was still rubbing its newly opened eyes at the sight of Jesus; the same Jesus who had just

been baptized and yet to perform any public miracles. He withdraws to Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptist, makes his home in a small seaside fishing village called Capernaum, and he picks up where John the Baptist left off, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!”

So, we know they didn’t follow Jesus because of anything he was *doing*. Instead, I think their willingness to follow Jesus had more to do with who Jesus was and who these fishermen were. I think it had to do with what Jesus had to give and what they needed. Halfway around the world to Minnesota in the year 2024 and the mysterious and sanctified life of Word and Sacrament we share together are still about who Jesus is and who we are; what this world needs and the gift God in Christ has to give. And again: non-

transactional. It's not what the world or you or I have earned; it's about what we need and what is freely given.

Back to the Sea of Galilee, where Peter and Andrew are looking down the barrel of a life spent casting net after endless net, forever chasing the next big catch. Meanwhile, James and John play the part of the dutiful sons in their father's boat.

Of course, we don't exactly know what had been going on in the lives of those four fishermen up until the moment Christ called them, but we do know that whatever it was, it could not compete with being saved from themselves, set free to live a new life in God...*and setting others free in kind*. Setting others free in kind. That's the fishing for people part.

Jesus didn't gather Peter, Andrew, James, and John together to teach them about the love of God off in some cave somewhere and then it was their special little thing that

had to be protected and told only to the chosen initiates.

Quite the opposite, right?

Jesus compares the gathering of disciples to fishing and if you've ever been fishing, it isn't the most precise, formulaic activity in the world. You get to decide where the line goes in but at the end of the day you don't get to decide what bites or when. And yes, they were fishing with nets, not hooks on lines, but again, if you've ever seen a fishing boat hauling in a catch, it's not just one kind of fish that ends up in the net is it?

This capital N capital T 'New Thing' God is doing through Christ in the Spirit is for *everybody*. There is no one that is outside God's net, so to speak. And whether you know it or not, feel it or not; believe it or not, you, me, and the whole created order are being pulled in; closer and closer to God; closer and closer to the Love that knew you and

blessed you and called you from before the foundation of the world.

A really big net. The biggest. No one and nothing outside of it. All of us; being set free.

So what does that look like? What is the shape of a life that has been freed to answer Christ's call? Our Collect of the Day gives us an image; an icon; of what that might look like:

“Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works...”

We who have been freed to follow Christ proclaim the Good News to the world not so that the world can look at our works but so that “we and the whole world may perceive the glory of Christ's marvelous works.”

As the Episcopal Church in Minnesota looks forward to its 168th year of proclaiming Christ in Word and Sacrament; in justice, fellowship, and learning; in laughter, tears, and play; the leap of faith that began with Peter, Andrew, James, and John continues here today.

The God who created you and loves you is setting you free, even now. Not someday, once you're "worthy enough," or whatever else. *Right now.*

Drop whatever net you're holding. Don't worry; it and whatever else you're holding will be right where you left it if you really want it back; but know that you have already been set free. The saving work of God has been, is now, and is to come. Moment to moment and unto the end of the age.

Enjoy it and share it! The creative, redeeming, and saving power of God in Christ was given to be enjoyed and shared; just like it was shared with Peter, Andrew, James, and

John; and just like *they* shared it with *someone else*; who shared it with someone else; who shared it with someone else; and on down the line until the first person who ever shared with you that God loves you and will never let you go; that even death cannot keep God from loving you, forgiving you, and setting you free.

May you who have been set free to follow Jesus, freely share his life with others as his life was freely shared with you, “that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works,” from Galilee to Minnesota, world without end, Amen.

