



“Career Change”

Preached by Anne R. Ledbetter

Scripture – Mark 1:14-20

January 22, 2012

Have you ever gone fishing? Do you like to fish? My earliest recollection of fishing goes back 45 years. I was in 5th grade and spent a week at a friend’s lake house where we took cane poles, baited our hooks with worms or crickets, and dropped the line right over the boat dock. We fished for hours, and were continually thrilled by the sudden disappearance of our float beneath the water indicating a fish had taken the bait. We pulled in mainly sunfish and brim, and at one point a 2-1/5 pound catfish with whom we had been scrimmaging for days. He was our prize catch that summer.

Twenty years later my brother Woody – quite the hunter and fisherman – took Keith and me and the kids fishing on his boat off the coast of South Louisiana. The equipment was a bit fancier, and as I recall the fish were not biting – at least not for Keith and me and the children. Woody, on the other hand, kept pulling in catch after catch. We each in turn, handed him out fishing rod, and within a minute or two, Woody had reeled in another fish with our tackle. He showed us over and over again, how to hold the fishing rod lightly in our hands, so that we could feel the slightest tug on the line, then pause a second before gently jerking the line and setting the hook in the mouth of our prey. We tried and tried, and never succeeded, while Woody hauled in over 20 fish that morning – using each of our poles. That day nearly finished me on fishing. I sensed that I was not cut out to be an angler, but we all saw without a doubt that my brother Woody was a natural who made the task appear easy. He had, and has, a remarkable gift for fishing.

Today’s scripture passage implies that fishing is part of the job description for a disciple. Jesus approaches these 2 pairs of fishermen from the shores of Lake Galilee, inviting them to join his mission. And immediately they do. He calls first to Simon and his brother Andrew, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of people.” In *The Message* version of this text, Eugene Peterson puts it this way,

“Jesus said to them, ‘Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.’” Mark tells us that immediately the brothers dropped their nets and followed him. A little farther Jesus sees more fishermen, James and his brother John in the boat mending their nets, and Jesus calls out to them as well, and they too turn and follow leaving their father as well as their nets.

Our text from Mark is a pithy passage, with a bracing, urgent rhythm. From the beginning verse, “Now after John was arrested...” we are put on alert that being God’s messenger can be dangerous. Jesus launches his career proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled” speaking not of *chronos* marked by sand spilling through an hourglass or seconds ticking off a clock, but of *kairos* time – that ordained, opportune moment disclosed by God. Jesus announces that the kingdom of God is at hand, calls people to repent, that is, turn toward God, and believe in the good news.

To our ears the term *Good News*, or the more traditional word *gospel*, sounds pleasant enough, referring to the Christian message. But for those in first century Palestine, Mark’s use of the term packed a potent political punch, challenging the powers of the empire. The Romans used the Latin word *Evangelium* (literally, *good news*) to refer to a herald of the emperor. Listen to this inscription from Asia Minor around 9 BC: “The most divine Caesar (whom) we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things...who being sent to us as a Savior, has put an end to war...The birthday of the god Augustus has been for the whole world the beginning of good news.” You see Roman emperors understood themselves as lords, saviors, and redeemers of the world. The messages by the emperor were called evangelium (good news), regardless of whether or not their content was particularly cheerful and pleasant. Remember that decree that went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed? *Evangelium*, good news. When the evangelists employ the Greek word *Euangelion*, they are asserting, “The emperors pretend to be gods and illegitimately claim to dispense good news, but Jesus preaches real good news from God and embodies its truth and power.” Mark describes Jesus proclaiming the good news of the gospel, emphasizing that it is not the emperors who can save the world, but God. The early Christian confession that “Jesus is Lord” thus put forth an implicit political claim: Caesar is NOT Lord!¹

When Jesus comes striding on the scene in Mark, he declares that God’s dominion is here and now. God is with us, and for us. Turn around, come and see! Receive the good news: God calls us, loves us, forgives us, redeems us, and abides with us always. Through his teaching, his life, his death, his resurrection, Jesus will

embody this Good News so that we behold it as THE Good News, The Best News of All Time for Creation, The Ultimate Truth for all Time.

The four fishermen in our passage today dropped their nets, and followed – creating quite a career change for themselves. Have you ever changed careers? It can be stressful, exciting, scary, liberating, and unsettling. No doubt such was the case for those first disciples who were mesmerized by this rabbi of radical teachings, yet quite unsure where their teacher was leading them.

You know Jesus' promise "I'll make you to be fishers of people" was certainly catchy – no pun intended – but the metaphor breaks down as a descriptive model for evangelism. Think about it: what do fishermen usually do with the fish they catch? Sell them, or clean them and eat them. That's not the purpose of "catching people." In fact, capturing people is not the objective of Christian evangelism, despite the occasional experience of being entrapped in our home by a fervent Jehovah's Witness.

We need another image as evangelists. All week I've been remembering the boat trip on Lake Galilee I experienced during a pastors' pilgrimage to the Holy Land five years ago. Our boat pilot was also a fisherman who took out a net somewhat similar to what the disciples used, and showed us how to cast it into the sea. I got a wonderful picture of him casting the unfurled net, revealing grace similar to a tennis player swinging a racquet or a golfer a club. He also reminded me of a Frisbee specialist winding and unwinding with skill and artistry. He gathered the net and flung it soaring into the air and out over the water. It was poetry in motion, and his movement brought to mind one of Jesus' parables where he describes a sower broadcasting seed enthusiastically and extravagantly. Surely this fluid image of the fisherman casting his net, or the sower scattering seed, captures the spirit and intent of evangelism – sharing good news passionately and generously with no strings attached.

Not all are called to be fishing experts like my brother Woody or professional preachers like Greg and Jill and I; however, God calls each of us to be evangelists, literally *messengers of good news*. Following Jesus means accepting a career change of a divine order.

As we encounter people who seem lost or frightened, teens who appear defeated or distressed, men and women who are searching for truth and meaning, then it is up to us to cast our nets of gospel love continually, in word and deed. How? By showing care and concern for a person in crisis, by listening to a friend or stranger in need, by lending a helping hand to someone in distress, by inviting, even bringing, a friend to church – not to convert them or make them Presbyterian, but

to share bread for the journey, to offer living water to a parched soul – by cooking breakfast for people who are homeless and hungry, praying for the person battling cancer, shoveling a widowed neighbor’s driveway, spending Saturday with Habitat building houses for low income families, mentoring a child after school, driving an elderly person to the doctor, serving as a covenant partner to one of our 9th graders in confirmation.

What happens when God’s Good News is proclaimed? Light breaks through the darkness, prisoners are set free, the blind see, the lame walk, and people begin to experience salvation, the wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

We live in a world which reverberates with bad news: debt crisis, suicide bombings, gang violence, drug cartels, a senseless and merciless beating of a young man on Independence Mall in Philadelphia. Our culture routinely gravitates to the sensational news – severe weather warnings, campaign rancor, personal drama in lives of movie stars and pop idols.

News journalists are called to tell the best story of the day – the one that grabs readers and relays information they didn’t know or that identifies a trend that defines their world. News which satisfies the listeners’ questions, addresses their predicament, engages their sense of wonder. But Christ calls us, as his followers to proclaim the news of the Kingdom of God – not the story of the day or the week, but the story of our life, the ultimate story.ⁱⁱ

The everyday news of journalism causes a brief sensation until the next day, or week or month. But the Good News experienced by these Galilean fishermen was different – it was life-changing, life-directing, and life-fulfilling. Christ calls us, whatever our circumstance – as students or accountants, as parents or physicians, as lawyers or teachers, researchers or waiters, social workers or construction workers – to broadcast the good news of the gospel in word and deed, through love and action. Friends, Jesus calls everyone one of us to a career change – to be not only consultants, coaches, engineers, counselors and sales clerks, but first and foremost news casters, sharing the gospel of God’s abiding presence, redemptive power and everlasting peace. What will that look like in your life? What may that mean for the realm of God?

ⁱ Daniel Clendenin, “Are You An Evangelical?” www.journeywithjesus.net For Sunday, January 22, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Ray Waddle, “The Ultimate ‘News’” January 12-22, 2006, p. 29, *Disciplines* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2005.)