

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany
February 12, 2023
Scripture: Matthew 4:12-23

In case you are wondering about the theme for today, it is about being called by God, if the hymn titles didn't give it away!

The four gospels were written to different audiences and for different purposes. One of my commentaries made a point and said "Don't try to harmonize them.", which makes sense. I bake and am always reading, trading, and sharing recipes. If I give a recipe to an experienced cook, I will just say "Knead the dough." they will know what that means. If it is a novice cook I will have to explain what and how to knead. Different audience, different story. The gospels are like that. Mark was written to the Romans. Luke, the most complete gospel, was the historical narrative, written in Greek for an intellectual community. John wrote for the believers and wrote more about the resurrected Christ. Mathew wrote in Hebrew for Israel; he has a lot of the Old Testament scriptures to show that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. That is why different gospels have different stories and are written with different slants.

This scripture starts right after the 3 temptations from the devil. There was time in between. This time was described in John 1:19 through John 3:36. We must not think that John the Baptist was thrown into prison immediately after Jesus' temptation. Matthew wrote topically not chronologically. So, this scripture starts with Jesus moving his headquarters, for lack of a better word, from the south by Nazareth to the north by Capernaum. Then, as Matthew was writing to the Israelites, he referenced Old Testament scripture and that Jesus fulfilled it. This Galilee of the Gentiles was a real place, and many Romans had migrated there. It had become a resort area. Jesus spent most of His ministry in the region of Galilee, there were hills and the Sea of Galilee. These inhabitants of that area had gone from walking in darkness to now sitting or dwelling in darkness. Jesus brought them a bright light of His teaching, preaching and healing.

Interesting phrase, “kingdom of heaven”. Matthew uses that term 32 times, and the Kingdom of God only 5 times. Remember the Jewish people and their reverence for the name of God. Matthew would substitute heaven for God, and Mark, writing to the Romans, and Luke writing to the Greeks, would use the Kingdom of God. Different audience, different vocabulary. Kingdom means rule, reign, authority rather than a specific realm or country. It is a spiritual rule of our hearts, not a political rule.

Quick aside, one of my commentaries mentioned that we traditionally believe that Jesus had a 3-year ministry. It is divided as such: the first year was one of obscurity, the second year was one of popularity, and the third year was one of increasing rejection. The events that happened in John chapters 1 - 4 were at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus' first-time calling Andrew and Peter, the wedding of Cana, His first time cleansing the temple, talks with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria.

So, before Jesus gets more involved with His preaching He calls His first Disciples. He had already met Simon and Andrew. In the Gospel of John, they were standing next to John the Baptist, Jesus walked by and John said “Behold the Lamb of God”. Simon and Andrew then followed Jesus, for a bit, then went back to the Sea of Galilee. The next time is found in Mark and Luke. Jesus then called them to be His disciples again, they followed again then left. This time, in Matthew, Jesus calls them to apostleship, to become fishers of men. They follow and stay this time. They are so much like us, or we are so much like them. How often do we get excited about doing something, whether it is a church project, read the Bible in a year, commit to daily exercise, then fall off and go back to our old ways of doing or not doing it. Think about after the crucifixion, what do the disciples do, go back to what is familiar and safe. They know how to fish for fish, not necessarily how to fish for people.

The term “fishers of men” was not new. Greek and Roman philosophers had used it to refer to catching people by teaching and persuasion. But remember, Jesus also referenced the shepherd looking for the lost sheep, as well as the fishermen.

Jesus referenced sheep and shepherds often, but there is not a record of a shepherd being one of the original 12. Four to seven were fishermen, and possibly two more were

fishing businessmen. There was also a tax collector, a zealot, and Judas, which Google described as a thief as there is no listing of his prior profession.

Now why so many fishermen? Fishing is hard work. They were busy either sorting a catch, preparing for a catch, mending equipment, specifically the nets. The nets were circular about 20 to 25 feet around. That took a lot of strength to throw it from the boat as it also had sinkers attached to the outer edge, never mind hauling it back in when it had a catch of fish. Fishermen were busy people not afraid to work. What is the modern saying, need something done ask a busy person. They were also courageous. Remember the storms on the Sea of Galilee. And patient. I can sit outside and read, I can sit in a boat and read, but I cannot sit or stand with a fishing rod. No interest, but I can wait to have bread rise. The search committee is also patient, we are going on 2 years to find the right person for this church. Fishermen also had the skill of working together and cooperating. It needed several people hauling in the same direction to gather in the full nets. And let's face it, you need faith, to keep going out there daily to get the fish.

Now why so many fishermen? They were hard workers, courageous, patient, could work together, and had faith.

Let's jump 2000 years and bring it to us. We may not have been fishermen when we were called, but we all were called. God used the natural gifts that we had plus gave us gifts to further assist His body. These gifts do not expire, nor do we retire from using them. Let me repeat, **THESE GIFTS DO NOT EXPIRE, NOR DO WE RETIRE FROM USING THEM.** I get it the body slows down. I once was able to work in my vegetable garden for 10 hours, now it is 4 hours, then a break, and go back later that day or the next day, but I am still using my farming knowledge. Our gifts may change, instead of worker bee gifts, we become prayer warriors. How is that for a promotion, from a bee to a warrior!! This body, this Church, Southampton Congregational, still needs you and your gifts. I look around and I see hard workers, people who are courageous, patient, have faith, and work well together. The clean-up time for our annual meeting was amazing! The Church does not put people out to pasture.

Now you understand the theme of today, Called by God. I am not going to insult your intelligence by drilling the point. We all know about the teams or see different things that need to be done around here. We need everyone's gifts for this branch of the Body of Christ to work. Pray to see where and how God would have you contribute your gifts. Each and every one of you is a blessing to this Body. We need you; we need each other. Amen.

- Candy Iwanicki