

Mark 1:14-20
January 24, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is one line in the Gospel reading for today that always makes me laugh.

Mark is a gospel of few words, but in today's text he wants to make sure you know that Simon and Andrew were fishermen.

Why were they casting a net into the sea? Well, because they were fishermen.

Now, had this been in John, it would be expected, because John likes to use a lot of words. But Mark is writing as if there is a limit to the number of characters he has. It's the tweet of the 4 gospels!

But, in the very first chapter, in the 16th verse, Mark tells us that Simon and Andrew were fishermen.

So, they weren't on the Sea of Galilee on vacation. This wasn't a Saturday let's get out of Nazareth trip. They weren't farmers who were visiting a family member who needed to bring in the catch. No. They were fishing, because they were fishermen. That's what fishermen do. They fish.

And this is important, because of what Jesus says to them. Jesus doesn't ask them to follow him and bake for people or do taxes for people or give a haircut for people. No. He tells the fishermen to follow him and to fish for people.

Now some people say that "fishing for people" was code. That all rabbis told their followers to follow and fish for people. But, Mark makes it clear that these are fishermen who have been invited to put down their fishing nets and start fishing for people.

The important thing is that Jesus knows who they are, fishermen. He sees what they are good at, casting nets. And then he invites them to bring their gifts of fishing and casting nets with them as they go out to share God's love in the world.

He never asks them to stop being who they are. He just asks them to use their gifts to spread the gospel.

So, the good news for us today is that we do not have to be someone else to share the good news. God calls us just as we are and who we are to be the ones who catch others up in God's grace, mercy, and peace.

If you're a fisherperson, come fish. If you are a gardener, come garden. If you are a cook, come cook. If you are a computer geek, come be a computer geek. If you're mechanic, come fix things. If you're a nurse, come nurse. If you're a teacher, come teach. If you're a writer, come write.

Just come as you are and together, with Jesus, we will catch all people up into God's love.

You do not have to be anyone else but who you are. God can use anyone to share his message of peace, and actually God needs each and every one of us, because it's a huge world filled with millions of people. So, we've all been deployed all over the place to office buildings, computer screens, hospitals, stores, schools, and even phone calls with friends and family.

Everywhere each one of us goes, we are sent to let people know they are loved by God through our own words and actions.

Through our own experience, we share who God is with the world, and when people realize that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for them, they also will be caught up with us in God's love.

When I did my summer of being a hospital chaplain at University Hospital when it used to be off of Colorado Blvd, I met a girl who was distraught. She had a lot of health problems and some addiction issues. Being the good chaplain, I asked her if we should pray. She told me she didn't know how to pray.

I thought I was being reassuring when I said, "Well praying is just talking to God. You can do that." Then she told me that she didn't know the language. I gave her a puzzled look and she went on to clarify that she didn't know how to use the thees and thous.

She didn't think she could speak God's language, which was heartbreaking, because you could see very clearly that she wanted to chat with God. She was yearning for it, but she didn't know that she was good enough already, just as she was. God didn't need her to be anyone else or for her to use special language.

I think that was the best news she ever heard. For being in the hospital, she became really happy, and when I checked in on her after that, she would tell me how much she had been talking to God. She wasn't feeling so alone anymore.

I have no idea what happened to her, but in realizing that she was already everything God wanted her to be, she got caught up in God's love and maybe she became a disciple as well, someone who is using her gifts to share God's love in the world in order to bring hope to those who are hurting.

That summer I was chaplaining, because I was a chaplain, and because of that I chaplained someone into God's open arms.

And you might be thinking, well – you're a pastor, so of course that's something you would do.

But, did you see CBS Evening News on Friday? Steve Hartman has a series called, "On the Road." And he was in Tipton, Indiana where, Robert Peters is a Pizza Hut delivery man.

Robert has been delivering pizzas for Pizza Hut for 31 years. His family has encouraged him to find another job, but Robert loves delivering pizzas. It's his call in life.

When asked why he's still delivering pizzas, Robert said it is his purpose in life in order to make people happy. He knows that often he is the only person some people see and it's important to him that they see a friendly face who cares about them.

Robert doesn't deliver pizzas because of the money, obviously, because he was still driving an old rundown Oldsmobile. That was until one of his regulars, caught up in God's love as experienced through Robert, decided the community should come together to buy Robert a new car, pay the insurance, and give him gas money so that he could continue his ministry.

Through his pizza delivering, Robert impacted other people's lives and made the world a better place. As Luther said, "a Christian shoe maker doesn't put little crosses on every shoe, but makes the best shoes possible at a fair price." Robert was a deliveryman who did the best job he could without demanding a tip.

Robert was delivering pizza, because he was a deliveryman. Jesus said to him, follow me and I will make you deliver for people.

Jesus calls us to be his disciples and invites us to bring all of our gifts and talents with us, because that is what he uses to proclaim the good news to the whole world.

Becoming a disciple doesn't mean we have to change. Being a disciples means just that we see the world differently.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John didn't literally fish for people, but they used what they knew, fishing, to help others see God's love.

The fishermen knew it made no sense to cast a net where there are no fish, so there was no need to preach about Jesus life, death, and resurrection where there were no people.

They knew that fish like to eat, and people like to eat, so they shared a meal and then fed people with God's word.

They took what they knew and used it to grow the Kingdom of God, not for themselves, but for the sake of others, and the whole world.

So, who are you? What is Jesus calling you to do in the Kingdom? And how might we, with all of our varied gifts and talents, make a difference in Elizabeth and beyond? How can we, together, bring the peace of Christ to a hurting world?

You are not called to be something you are not. You are called to be who God made you to be. Simon and Andrew were casting nets, because they were fishermen. So, how might Mark refer to you? If Mark was narrating your story as a disciple, what would he say?

Let's find out by filling in some blanks. Kind of like mad libs. Remember those? Ok. Ready? So...

Blank (your name) was blanking (whatever activity you do), because she/he is a blanker (the activity with er on the end). Jesus called blank (your name) to blank (whatever that activity is) for people. (Repeat)

OK – here is an example. Van was skiing, because he is a skier. Jesus called Van to ski for people. Does that make sense?

You can do it a few different ways, because I'm sure you have a bunch of different identities aside from what you "do for a living." Parent, sibling, friend, whatever hobby you might have.

Has everyone come up with something? I know I put you on the spot.

Now, if you'd like to, take your favorite one and share it in the comment section on FaceBook, or in the chat on Zoom, or just write it down if you're on the phone or watching it recorded off of the website.

Now that you have it written down, what does it mean for you and the world? How is God calling you to do whatever it is you love for the good of others? That's your homework for the week. Contemplating that.

And then, keep it in mind. Don't let it just be a fleeting exercise.

God is calling you, just as you are, to follow Jesus in proclaiming the truth about God to the world – the truth that God is love, and that is evidenced in the great variety of disciples.

Thanks be to God! Amen.