

Matthew 4:12-23

Jan 26, 2020

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

Has anyone here ever gone fishing with a large net?

To really understand today's Gospel reading, you have to understand how the disciples fished for fish in order to understand how they, and we, are to fish for people.

Andrew, Peter, James, and John did not go out individually with a pole and hook to catch fish one by one. No. Instead they used a large net and a couple of boats with a bunch of people.

It's important to remember that nets catch all kinds of fish – big and small, red and green, top feeders and bottom feeders, yummy and icky, beautiful and ugly. Nets catch everything, including things that aren't fish at all.

Nets do not discriminate.

It's also important to remember that the disciples did not fish alone. It takes a community to fish with a net. It takes team work and communication. It takes patience and perseverance. It takes a group of people working together.

The disciples fished with nets, and we are sent out into the world to fish with a net as well. We are sent to cast the net of God's love over all people, which will catch them all up – no matter what they look like, what they do for a living, or where they come from.

The net does not discriminate.

Jesus Christ is God's net, sent to catch all people up into God's love.

Jesus is the net walking along the Sea of Galilee who will catch all people up into God's amazing grace, but the disciples do not realize it. They have no idea that God's love in the flesh has called them to go fish for people and that he is the one they will cast out into the world.

Jesus, the one who comes to bring salvation to all of creation, is God's net of love who doesn't discriminate. Salvation is for everyone.

And here is the interesting thing about Jesus walking along the beach that day. Jesus says, “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Repent literally means to turn around. Jesus is telling people to just turn around and see that their salvation is at hand. Look and see that you are already forgiven.

Repentance and forgiveness, they happen simultaneously. We turn and we know the forgiveness that is already here, it’s already ours. We need only turn to see what has already been given to us freely by God.

Forgiveness. That is God’s ultimate act of love, because God wants to be in relationship with us. That’s the whole reason Jesus came to be with us. Love is relational, and when a relationship has been broken, forgiveness is the only way to heal it.

So, God comes to us where we are and gives us God’s very own self, in the flesh, so that our relationship with God can be restored, and that leads to the restoration of other relationships as well.

God casts God’s net of love and we need only look around to see that we have already been caught up in the net, and because it’s a net, we are not alone.

Repentance and forgiveness – they happen at the very same time. God comes to us and taps us on the shoulder and says, “Surprise! Here is the gift of eternal life. Here is the gift of an unending relationship with God. Here is the gift of God not giving up on you. Here is the gift of God with us always. Here is the gift of Emanuel. Here is the gift of light.”

But, people are weird. We do not want God’s free gift of love. We want it to be earned and deserved. And, we want stipulations put on it so that it is hard to get so that we can keep it for ourselves and away from others whom we do not like.

But, the net does not discriminate. The net is for all people.

That seems like foolishness to those who believe that they have to earn God’s love. Those who believe that they or others are not good enough and that a fine line must be walked in order to deserve God’s love are the ones who are perishing. That is a death sentence, which Jesus takes on for us to the cross destroying it forever.

God’s net is known to us on the cross. On the cross, Jesus opens his arms up to embrace everyone. He does not discriminate. He forgives absolutely everyone.

Jesus Christ is the net, who brings everyone into God's kingdom, a kingdom of love and acceptance for all people. A place that is free of shame and guilt. A place of rest. A place of peace.

Generally most people would agree that being caught is not a good thing. It seems like foolishness, but for those of us who have been caught up in the net of God's unconditional love, it is life and it is life giving.

It's as if we have been pulled out of a murky polluted pond and put into a fresh water spring where we can see more clearly and where we are fed with good food – the bread of life.

So, our call, as Jesus disciples is to cast that net of love out into the world so that all people can be pulled from dismay and in to hope.

God is not against us. God is for us, and with us. Always.

The creator of all that exists thinks that the world needed one of you too. That's how much you are loved.

And living in God's love, we are able to see the world as God sees the world, because the Lord is our light. Just as it is in a scary dark room when all the lights get turned on, and all of our fear disappears, so it is with Christ. He casts out all of the darkness of thinking we can't be loved, and all fear is chased away.

Christ is our light. So, whom shall we fear? God is our life, so of whom shall we be afraid? There is no one.

And because we are set free from all fear, we can cast God's net into the murky waters of this world and bring others into the clear blue waters of God's unconditional love. It's the one thing that everyone needs to truly live. And, the oppressor needs it as much as the oppressed.

I think I've waited long enough to refer to latest Star Wars movie. Has everyone seen the Rise of Skywalker?

I'm not going to give anything major away, but in the movie there is a scene with this huge serpent thing that is threatening Rey, Poe, and Finn. It's big and scary and Poe just wants to kill it. Kill before you get killed is his philosophy.

But, Rey senses that the reason this creature is screaming and scary is because it's actually injured. So, she carefully goes to it and heals its wound. Healed, this living being goes off rejoicing.

I'm sure we've all heard the saying, "hurt people, hurt people." So, how do we go about casting the net of love onto those who are hurting so that they can be healed?

It was the force that healed the serpent. Rey was just the agent of that healing. And just as Rey is the agent of the force, so we are the agents of God's grace. It's not our net. It's God's net, and we have been invited to cast it out into a hurting world, to bring peace to those who are tormented.

And each of us has been gifted in different ways to help cast that net so that it will cover all people in all times and all places in God's loving embrace.

Jesus called Andrew, Peter, James, and John to fish for people, because they already knew how to fish for fish. You also already know how to do a bunch of things and some of them really well. So, what might God be calling you to do to bring his love into the world?

Maybe you are called to write for people, or bake for people, or knit for people, or sew for people, or shop for people, or host parties for people. Or God only knows what.

But, can you hear Jesus calling you to take what you already know and love out into the world to share the good news of God's unconditional love for all people? How might you reframe something that you are already an expert at in order to bring others into the kingdom of God?

Not all of the disciples were fishermen, and only the ones who were were called to fish for people. The other 8 brought a whole variety of gifts to the table, and so do you.

And let's always remember that one person alone cannot cast a net big enough to catch all people up into God's love, so it takes all of us with our own special gifts and abilities working together to cast a net big enough to catch up the whole world. It also takes all of us, because love is relational, and God is relationship, and it takes all of us to show that God's love does not discriminate.

Last week was the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Together with other denominations we proclaim that there is only one net. There is no Lutheran net, no Episcopal net, no Catholic net. There is only one net and he is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who is God's non-discriminating love embodied for the salvation of the entire world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.