

## A Fish Tale

[based on Mark 1:14-20]

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is beginning His public ministry. He came to Galilee, and passing along by the Sea of Galilee, He encountered two sets of brothers who made their living as fishermen.

Fishing was a major industry in that area, and fishing with nets was the most common method.

Matthew 4:18 tells us that Simon and his brother Andrew had encountered Jesus previously. Then, in Luke 5:1-11 there is a story about Jesus noticing two fishing boats on the shore with the brothers washing their nets after a long day of limited success.

There were crowds following Jesus, wanting Him to preach to them. Jesus asked the brothers if He could use their boat as a speaking platform and requested them to push off a bit from shore, so He could address the crowd.

After that, he asked Simon and Andrew to go into deeper water and cast their nets. They shared with Jesus that the fishing had not been good that day, but Jesus encouraged them to try, nevertheless. To their amazement, their nets filled to the brim with fish. So, when Jesus asked the young men to follow him and he would show them how to fish for people, they were ready to accept the call.

Although Peter would be destined to tower as a significant figure among the disciples of Jesus, his brother Andrew, had a quiet way of connecting people. Before Jesus approached Simon on the shore of Galilee and invited him to follow, Andrew had already told his brother that the carpenter from Nazareth was the Messiah. [John 1:41] Andrew himself had already been a follower of John the Baptist, so he didn't hesitate to join Simon in accepting Jesus' invitation.

Although it took time for Jesus' message to get through to Simon, the important thing is that the brothers DID follow Him. In the same way, we too may question and falter, but we must never stop following.

Jesus used the boys' occupations to challenge them to fish for people, with the same energy they had used to fish for food. The gospel would be like a net, lifting people from the dark waters into the light of day, and transforming their lives.

The next set of fishermen Jesus encountered further up the shore, were Zebedee's sons James and John, and they were repairing their nets. These brothers too were called, and responded immediately. They had different personalities than Simon and Andrew, and had much to learn, but they were willing to follow, because God had always been uppermost in their lives.

Just to set the record straight, the disciples were not paragons of virtue...the Zebedee brothers would, at times, fail, deny, betray and desert Jesus, just like we do. It is our faithful repentance which allows us to be forgiven each and every time, in order to continue the journey.

So, having accepted the call to discipleship, how would that give the two sets of brothers an edge to fish for people? Well, even if you are not an avid fisherman, you probably know that people use many different types of bait to catch a fish.

As a fisher of people, we all have at our disposal, our life, words and actions to demonstrate the blessing of following Christ. Some people respond to HEARING about God; others respond to our ACTIONS that demonstrate God's love and grace; others SEE the joy and peace we have in our lives.

God will often link our backgrounds and our experiences, in revealing His purpose for our lives. Every day brings opportunities to fish – it was true then, and it is true now.

So, what is Mark revealing about Jesus that the Common Lectionary would recommend this passage as a theme during Epiphany? Jesus was unlike any other rabbi of His day because He commanded divine authority. The author Sam Parkes states: "Jesus doesn't act like your run-of-the-mill first century rabbi! Such teachers offered their teachings and waited for students to come to them, to persuade the rabbi to take them on as

students. Instead, Mark's Jesus is a teacher who commands, promises, and calls, with all the authority of God."

I cannot help but wonder what the reactions would be today to a modern-day call from Jesus to discipleship. How many of us would drop everything – career, family, possessions and privilege - to lead a nomadic life of service?

Yet, there are times when Jesus does come bursting into our lives. We must admit that God is more than just 'present' – He is active and working. He pushes into our finances, our calendars and our homes.

Take a moment to consider how the story of the fishermen might have taken a vastly different course when Jesus called them. They could have scratched their heads and pondered the pros and cons with each other, their families and their neighbours. They could have told Jesus, "Well, let us think about it for a while, maybe something might come along! Maybe a big school of fish will come and we will not be able to leave. Maybe our wives won't let us! Maybe our friends will make fun of us for leaving our jobs, our home, and our families to follow a guy who will travel around the country-side, preaching that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand - repent and believe the Gospel."

But, when Jesus called these fishermen, there was none of that. They didn't question His call; they didn't think about it; they didn't consult their families; they didn't wait to see if anything better was possible. They followed Him. **They** had a calling and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, encounters us today, let's follow Him and let Him be the Lord of our life. He doesn't want us to think about it; to study the pros and cons; to talk with our family and friends; to wait to see if anything better might come along; or if the situation we find ourselves in, might improve.

When Jesus calls us there is a sense of urgency; there is a sense that Jesus is erupting into our lives with such a strong force that we have no choice but to decide now, **not tomorrow**, or the next day, but now - now while He encounters us; while His presence is with us; while we have Him

beside us, to encourage our decision. He wants us to have a sense of His calling in our lives. We are the followers, we are His children, He is the father and the provider.

"Follow me and I will show you how to fish for people." Jesus calls us to a life of conviction, to a life of urgency, to a life of sharing, to a life of proclaiming His good news to others. But you might wonder, who do I share this story with, who is the one that I tell about Jesus? Who???

There was a little girl who had a very large collection of dolls heaped on her bed. A guest in her room one day asked her "I see you love dolls?" Then, with tender loving care, she spread out the whole collection for the guest to inspect and admire. The guest asked her, "Which doll do you love the most?" She hesitated, then said, "Promise not to laugh if I tell you?" He promised. She picked a ragged doll with a broken nose, whose hair had mostly come off, and one arm and leg were missing. "This is the one." "Why?" the visitor asked. "Because if I didn't love this one, nobody else would."

Jesus calls us to love the ones in this world that nobody else will love. Jesus calls us to reach out to the lonely, to the hungry, to the sick, to the ones in prison, to the disabled, to the forsaken, to the needy, to all of those people who need to hear that someone indeed does love them, and that someone is Jesus Christ. That is the greatest fish tale.

I want to close by quoting one verse of a hymn that is not found in the Book of Praise:

"Jesus, you have come to the lakeshore,  
Looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones;  
You only asked me to follow humbly.  
O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,  
And, while smiling, have spoken my name.  
Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me,  
By your side, I will seek other seas.

AMEN