
Many Ways to Fish, but the Call is to Fish

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A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler
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"As Jesus passed along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Here is another reason why I like the Bible. We are in the middle of Winter, and the gospel for today talks about going fishing.

Fish don't bite much in the winter time. The winter time is when the good fisherman rests inside by the fire and sorts out her tacklebox. He saunters into the fish store and looks at new rods and lures. Maybe he watches a television show about catching largemouth bass in Louisiana.

But you can also come to church, and hear Jesus talk about going fishing. The Bible is full of fishermen, and it even includes a story that takes the fish's point of view. In the story of Jonah, it is the fish who goes fishing. The fish goes humaning! It is a fish, a whale, who catches the disobedient prophet, Jonah. The Bible, remember, likes to take opposite points of views.

What was Jesus doing that day, by the Sea of Galilee, when he told Simon Peter and Andrew that if they followed him, he would make them fish for people?

Well, he was inviting them, not to a sense of fulfillment, but to a task. He was not saying, "follow me, and I will show you where there are thousands of fish!" He was not saying, "follow me, and I will make you rich." Or, "follow me, and you will have the answer to every question you have ever asked."

Jesus was not offering them fish. He was offering them the activity of fishing.

Last week in church, as we read the Gospel of John, I made the point that every one of the first believers of Jesus was looking for something. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus gets named with about fourteen different titles - everything from Son of God, to Son of Man, from rabbi to messiah to Lamb of God - all great titles, but all meaning different things.

The point is that different people, and different disciples, were all looking for something different in the first century. In Jesus, in the person of Jesus, in the person of one man, they all found the answer to their very different searches. Last week, Jesus appeared as the answer to all sorts of searches.

But this week, in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus does not offer any answer. He offers, instead, a task. He offers a job. He offers a journey. He sees some fishermen, doing their thing, and he makes his call analogous to what they

are doing. Follow me, he says, and I will make you fish for people.

Jesus does not offer the fish. Jesus offers the activity of fishing. Yes, I like to come to church in the winter time, and hear Jesus invite me to go fishing. And there are many ways to go fishing.

With a cast net, by yourself, or with a long seine net, and twenty friends. With a casting rod, a fly rod, or a bamboo rod. Without a boat, in a canoe, in a huge trawler.

There are as many ways to fish as there are ways to spread good news. We all have different ways to spread good news, but each of us is called to the same task. Spread good news. Fish for people.

With words and without words. With sound and with silence. With modern music and with ancient music. With choral music at the Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta, and with beautiful organ improvisation at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Fifth Avenue. There are as many ways to spread good news as there are ways to improvise at the organ, over and over again. There are as many ways to spread good news as there are to fish.

But the call is the same. Follow me, said Jesus, and I will make you fish, sing, conduct, and play, for people. In this world and the next.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler