
A Team of Fishermen – in Relationship

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam G. Candler
Epiphany 3 – Year B

As Jesus passed along 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.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:16–20

If you were a new general manager, trying to assemble a great baseball team, and you were constrained by the usual factors—like budget and availability—what kind of person would you choose to be on your team?

If you were starting a business, and you had a great vision and great energy for the enterprise, who would you hire to be on your team?

And if you were not hiring, but you were simply wanting to be hired—deciding to join some company, or some team—what kind of company would you sign on with?

If you realized one day that you needed a life partner, a husband or a wife, and you were willing to settle down into married adulthood, what kind of person would you look for in a partner?

In all these scenarios, what kinds of people would you choose? Who would you choose to be on your team?

Well, Jesus chose fishermen.

And Jesus did not choose sport fishermen, either. He did not choose the leisure fisherman who goes out looking for marlin and tarpon with his powerful boat and heavy tackle. Nothing against that sport, for it certainly provides thrill and drama and fun.

But Jesus chose working fishermen, guys who had to make a living in the drudgery of the occupation, day in and day out. Jesus chose people who fished because they had to work. Jesus chose people accustomed to hard work. They probably had grown up watching hard workers; they had grown up watching their families go fishing. Work was in their blood.

Secondly, Jesus chose results, not appearances. Jesus did not choose men who had access to fancy fishing rods and the latest gear from a mail-order catalog. When something broke, Jesus didn't need the people who only knew how to go out and buy a new piece of equipment. Jesus chose people who were able to fix broken things; they could repair lines and nets and boats – no matter what the result looked like. Jesus was not worried about appearances, and not worried about men or women; he chose both. Jesus was concerned with results.

Thirdly, Jesus chose people who were able to adapt. In particular, fishermen must adapt to weather. They may have the best-working equipment in the world, and the right energy and even the right people; but if the weather turns foul, there is no fishing that day. The world is full of changing conditions.

Weather changes, just as the moon goes through phases and just as the tide moves in and out of the marshes, and along the sandbars. Good fisherfolk watch the weather. They watch the moon and the tides and the water and the wind. It is in those conditions, after all, that fish appear – or disappear.

In fact, good fisherwomen pay attention.

Last week, I was with a good friend of mine at a dinner party. We were simply watching. We were observing our dinner companions. We noted couples interacting. We noticed various relations and relationships. We finally said to each other, “You know the fun part of life is paying attention.” When we figure out the art of truly paying attention in life, that is when life gets fun. “Watch, for you know not the hour!” Jesus said.

Well, good fisherfolk have learned that art. The hour is now, right now; it is always right now. They know how to pay attention.

Jesus chose fishermen to be on his team, people who knew how to work, people who could achieve results, people who could adapt, and people who enjoyed paying attention. That is what good fisherpeople do, and it is what any member of a good team can do. He works, she achieves results, he adapts, and she pays attention.

These uneducated and working-class fisherpeople were the first ones invited to be on his team. There were others, later, of course. But Jesus set the culture of his discipleship team with the principles inherent in good fishermen. I believe that those principles apply well to any team these days, even in today’s world where so few people really go fishing much any more.

Since the days of Andrew and Simon, and James and John, Jesus’s crew has expanded. There are many boats now, from ocean liners to canoes, all plying the waters for disciples of Jesus. There are many followers now, trained and untrained, with all kinds of nets, all striving for the kingdom of God.

And, today, no matter what your background or family or culture or training is, Jesus wants you on his team. Jesus continues to want the same sort of people on his team: those who work and persevere, those who strive for results, those who adapt, those who pay attention.

And, even if you don’t qualify in the top ten percent of your class in these characteristics, Jesus still wants you on his team, in his boat. Something about Jesus pulls you to him like a net gathers everything across the bottom of the sea. It doesn’t matter whether you are duly prepared, or duly cultivated. Something about Jesus draws you to his net and into his boat.

And, then, something else happens. Other characters in the boat do the training. Veterans on the baseball team pass on their skills and attitudes to the rookies. Wise company executives teach their trainees patience and kindness and perseverance. Spouses teach each other about love. Very few of us enter relationships fully prepared.

It is the relationship itself which teaches us about relationship. And so it is with being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus does not send us out into the world without first asking us to follow him, to get into the boat with him, to join a team that already has faithful members on it.

Jesus wants us in the crew. Jesus wants us in relationship. And, in relationship, Jesus uses each of us to teach the other. Jesus uses each of us to touch the world.

AMEN.

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