

## “Fishing Expedition”

### Sermon – January 26, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church

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I have been fishing maybe twice in my life. I tried it a couple of times in my youth and Boy Scouts, but just could not get into it. The bait and lures, the hooks, the rod and reel just were just a hassle to me. And then to stand on a shore or sit in a boat waiting and waiting and waiting.

Some derive a meditative experience, a reflective time. I derive—boredom. I didn’t even teach my boys to fish; the husband of one of my nieces taught them in their youth. And they still enjoy it.

I don’t mean to disparage the sport—I loved it when our older son Bob would go up to the Salmon River and catch and filet me fresh salmon. Fishing just isn’t for me.

Maybe I’d have had a different view if I had caught something—like Jesus did.

Today’s gospel lesson is the beginning of Jesus public ministry and takes place immediately after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. In Matthew’s account John the Baptist is arrested right at the start of Jesus’ ministry, though it will be another ten chapters before we find out the details.

Then Matthew sets the stage with Jesus moving from Nazareth to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee and then quoting almost verbatim from Isaiah 9 that we heard today.

Now Zebulun and Naphtali were old tribal areas in northern Israel by the Sea of Galilee on the eastern side of the Jordan [*show slide and circle*].

In Isaiah’s time it was the Assyrians who came and conquered them and all of the Northern Kingdom. Isaiah preached a message of hope that

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God will change that, saying in verse 2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.”

Over 700 years and several empires later, that prophecy was still not fulfilled and now it is the Romans who are in charge, having made Herod Antipas the ruler of Galilee and Perea [*show slide and circle*].

So Matthew recasts Isaiah’s words as now applying to Jesus. And Jesus picks up from John the Baptist saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” as both an echo and fulfillment of those words. [*change slide*].

He then goes for a walk by the sea and sees Simon—later to be called Peter—and Andrew his brother. Now unlike me, they were fishing with nets, not fishing poles. Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they leave their nets and follow him. And essentially the same thing happens again with James and John the sons of Zebedee.

So one day Jesus just goes for a walk tells two sets of brothers to follow him and they do without question or hesitation! Jesus makes two casts and nets himself four people. He is some fisher of men! (Now I say this strictly to get the play on words of fishermen and fisher of men. Some day we’ll have just “fishers” and “fishers of people” will have the same ring to it.)

Why did they just get up and follow him? We don’t know. Matthew gives no reason and doesn’t mention the calling of the other disciples other than to name the twelve in chapter 10.

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The disciples were apparently inspired by the mission and made radical commitments to the movement. The Roman empire relied on threat, coercion and enticements to recruit people into its military. The new kingdom, on the other hand, inspires them to participate in it.

The people in Zebulun and Naphtali in Isaiah’s time, and Galilee and Judea in Jesus time sat in darkness, but could see a great light. Despite the shadow of the world around them, the light had dawned.

And it’s easy today as it seems a shadow is falling on our land and on our religion to wonder when this dawn will become a bright day. But part of the Epiphany season is for us to see that God is here. He’s here in my heart and your heart. He’s in all that you heard we do, disproportionate to our numbers. To the care and support we give others and to each other. To those who once again willingly step up to session or deacons to help provide the leadership and care as the body of Christ.

Epiphany is a season of light not during the day but a season of light amidst the darkness. Of us not just going on a fishing expedition hoping to find something of value, but as Paul told the Corinthians to be “united in the same mind and the same purpose” and to proclaim the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and inspiring others in his ways.

As Professor of Early Church History and Spirituality Amy Oden says, “Epiphany is a time of the inbreaking of God once again in human history. The apparent powers of the world are unmasked, revealed to be a sham for all their bluster and posturing. During Epiphany, we recognize God's inbreaking in Jesus Christ, setting in stark relief the false, worldly powers that claim so much authority in our lives:

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success, productivity, dominance, self-reliance. They do not have the last word.”

No, the last word is Jesus and his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. Not just words but a series of actions designed to bring wholeness to individuals and communities.

Jesus calls people as they are, from where they are, being who they are.

You have been called. Go. Good luck with the fishing!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

Amen.