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Isaiah 9: 1 – 4
1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 18

Psalms 27: 1, 5 – 13
Matthew 4: 12 – 23

Jesus strolls along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, at the edge of the waters that lap up onto the village of Capernaum. It is a bright, sunny day and the birds screech joyfully to one another as they ride the currents of air, peering down into the water for signs of a meal, swooping and gliding. Jesus looks up at the birds and smiles.

The waves, driven by the winds across the sea, lap at Jesus' sandaled toes, and his attention is drawn down to the water. The waves, more like ripples, really, slap against the small stones and shells, and then softly recede back to whence they came. Slapping and receding. Rather like the birds swooping and gliding. Jesus watches as the water comes ashore and goes back, comes ashore and goes back. There is a gentle rhythm, not unlike a heartbeat, in the movement of the water, as if the sea is alive and this is its life blood pumping itself ashore. Jesus knows that the lapping and the receding of the water mimic the rhythms of his own life – going forth, withdrawing. Going forth among the people and ministering, then withdrawing for prayer, for time to connect with his own lifeblood, God.

Jesus looks back up as he hears men's voices calling to one another from boat to boat, across the water. The men are the fishers of Capernaum, and they have been out all night, plying the waters with their nets. The catch has been sorted and sent off to market, and now, the men are busy with their nets. He sees Simon and his brother, Andrew, and he knows them, though the three of them have never met. The two brothers have pulled a little way out from shore and are casting their nets on test throws to see if the repairs they've made will hold.

Drawing up closer to them, and shielding his eyes against the glare of the early morning sun slanting across the water, Jesus calls out to the brothers, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people!" Apparently impulsively, and rather astonishingly, the two young men pull all the nets back into the boat and wade ashore. Simon and Andrew quicken their steps to catch up to this stranger who has just lured them away from everything they have ever known, for Jesus is already on his way to the next boat where John and James await. Rabbis don't generally seek out their students; students seek out a rabbi. But not this time. Not now. The initiative is with Jesus. The first miracle of Jesus' ministry has begun: it is the miracle of a word so powerful that disciples are created.

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people!" In some ways, perhaps the fishers' lives will not be so different from what they know now. Instead of crisscrossing the waters of the Sea of Galilee, they will be traversing the *land* of Galilee. Instead of searching for unseen schools of fish, they will search for as yet unseen and unknown fellow disciples, some here, some there. These fishers have been accustomed to searching for what is unseen, though still very much present. And the fishers have thus far spent their lives feeding people from the realm of the unseen, so perhaps a new vocation of seeking out and feeding people in a new way from the unseen will not seem so very strange.

For the people of Capernaum, even as accustomed to living by the water as they are, there is still a fear of the water and its power. A fear of the storms that can arise quickly and create chaos. For the Jews, the waters of the deep have long represented chaos, and so to 'fish for people' perhaps is a very powerful and compelling way of representing salvation in terms that the fishers can fully appreciate.

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people!” What does it mean to become ‘fishers of people’ for Jesus? It means that discipleship is not about personal fulfillment. It’s about relationship and about others. What do Simon and Andrew and James and John think it means when they first hear it? It isn’t an unfamiliar metaphor to the Jews. It’s a call from God to a new life, a call to participate in what God is doing. It’s an invitation. But it must also be a frightening prospect: making oneself open to a life entirely different than the one that has been lived up to this point. And yet, the four young men don’t even hesitate.

What does it mean for *us* to fish for people, just as Simon, Andrew, James and John do? Fishing has some connotations that are not so positive, so perhaps that’s where the analogy breaks down (And this is net fishing, not baiting a hook!). Jesus is not calling us to lie in wait, hoping to snare people. Jesus is also not asking us to drag people to him against their will. Rather, we are being called to honor the dignity of every human being, as we say in our baptismal vows, by spending time with them, by sitting at table with them, by listening and talking with them. Jesus calls us, his fishers, to take people and their lives seriously, by encouraging repentance (which has nothing to do with making people feel guilty and bad about themselves and everything to do with lifting up to them the idea of turning to God), and by inviting them to join us in a joyful relationship with God.

As many of you know, the Vestry was on retreat this past weekend. What we discussed – and what you’ll be hearing more about – is something called “Invite, Welcome, Connect.” It’s a way of growing the Kingdom of God, by inviting people to have a relationship not just with us, but with God through Jesus Christ. It’s a way of ‘fishing for people,’ not to fill up the pews, but to share God’s love. It’s seeking out people and engaging them in the vision and agenda of the Kingdom of God. We will be inviting you to join us in this fishing expedition.

In order to fish for people, we will need to think about who and where are the fish in our neighborhood, in our world. What do these fish do, what do they think, what are they searching for, what do they believe, what are their needs, how we can help meet those needs, and how do we engage them?

Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, and then James and John. Later, Jesus will send his disciples out two by two. Jesus doesn’t call us to fish for people by ourselves; we are called to do it together. Author Herbert O’Driscoll likens our call and the results of our fishing to the reproductive process of cells under a microscope. First there is one cell: Jesus. Then two and then four. All from this original invitation to “Follow me!” Implicit in O’Driscoll’s analogy is the fact that we are to be organic, alive and growing.

“Follow me!” Jesus calls out heartily to Simon and Andrew, to you and to me. We, too, are people living in great darkness, in lands under the shadow of death. But we have seen a great light – the light of Christ. Following Jesus means following in the footsteps that crisscross the land and search for the unseen but present reality of God’s Kingdom that *is* all around us. Following Jesus means bearing the light of Christ, the compassion of Christ, into dark and unfamiliar places. Following Jesus means living with one foot already in the Kingdom, and one foot firmly planted, not on land, but in the teeming sea of humanity. “Follow me and I will make you fish for people!” Let’s get our nets ready!

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