

*Based on Matthew 4:12, 17-23. One fish, two fish, Jesus calls us human fish.*

It seems so obvious in hindsight. Jesus strolling along the seashore, collecting one follower after another, the way you and I collect seashells on vacation at Rehoboth Beach. Telling them to *fish for people* - and they do! - as if somehow that makes any more sense to first century Galileans than it does to us today.

It could never have been otherwise, we have collectively decided, in hindsight. Pre-ordained from the beginning of time that Jesus will do exactly what he does and the ministry will unfold exactly as it will and we will be sharing the story exactly as we are here in this sanctuary two thousand years later.

We forget how it all begins, at least in Matthew's Gospel, right here in Chapter 4, verse twelve, which tells us the ministry of Jesus begins *only after* the ministry of John the Baptist has ended, as if it is intended to be a *continuation* of that ministry and not its own separate thing, as we in the church have come to see it.

Indeed, not one chapter earlier, the message of John the Baptist matches word for word the message of Jesus: *repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near*. Which may sound somewhat off-putting to our progressive Presbyterian anti-fire-and-brimstone ears, but which simply means at its core that God wants the world to be well, and don't you want to be part of it?

Or as our SPC Identity statement puts it, don't you want to *be and become a person of radical compassion, working for justice and wholeness in yourself and in the world?*

The main difference in Matthew's Gospel between John and Jesus is that John draws the people to a particular place at a particular time in a particular river while Jesus goes where the people are. A lesson we in the church are all having to re-learn in the post-COVID hybrid world where our previous expectations of in-person congregation-wide sanctuary-centered worship are necessarily shifting in the direction of reimagining our programming for a church that has truly *left the building*.

Either way, the answer to the question - don't you want to be part of God making the world well? - turns out to be yes, emphatically, for crowds who flock to the Jordan where John the Baptist is preaching, for James and John and Simon and Andrew who come running when Jesus himself comes calling, for you and me when we come home every Sunday to this sanctuary of hope, for Keri Mahoney, Jennifer Jones, Patti McCarthy, and Derek Smith as they kneel with our hands laid upon them in ordination to the ministry of discernment and governance and to the ministry compassion, service and witness, and for Cathy Cross, Paul Denchy, Ellie Lloyd, Mica Martin, Chris Morehouse, Carol Wood, Emily Gross, Dave Smith, and Bob Tucker, who say yes to yet another term as Deacon and Ruling Elder.

But the truth is, if we are honest, we are never entirely sure what that *yes* will turn out to look like any more than these early followers of Jesus are. They have all kinds of ideas, to be sure - Simon and Andrew and James and John - about what it is they have signed up for with Jesus. Just like we have all kinds of ideas about what kinds of ministries we need to perpetuate - and perhaps let go of - here at SPC.

But how are these fishermen really to know what will come as they join Jesus in casting the vision? And how can Jesus tell them what to expect, here in the beginning, even if he does have the whole plan worked out through to the end (which I personally doubt), and how could they have any clue what it means even if he does end up telling them? There is only so much they can know in this early moment of *yes*. The rest is a walk of faith.

Which is not unlike where we find ourselves today in our own *yes* to the ongoing vision of a world made well, with us as a part of it. So much has changed here at SPC, we could easily feel adrift with the fishermen in the Sea of Galilee. But the vision of wholeness remains the same, which we claim again today, as we pass the torch to our newly ordained leaders. And the call to fish for people continues, here in the sanctuary and out on the soccer field, whether the crowds come to us as they have in the past or we journey out to join the people in person and online as we must in the weeks and months and years to come.

At the end of the day, we all take a leap of faith in response to the vision. Perhaps out of conviction, perhaps out of desperation, but most assuredly because we can see quite clearly that the world around us *is not yet* fully well, and if the vision of wholeness, enfleshed through this guy Jesus, passed on from one generation to the next, from one prophet to the next, from one pastor to the next, from one Deacon to the next, from one Ruling Elder to the next, can bring a bit more healing and a bit more wholeness, why not keep giving it a try?