

Old Testament Lesson—Psalm 27:1-9

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

New Testament Lesson—Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Why fisherman? Why...fisherman?

I can't be the only one who's asked this question, right? I mean—why does Jesus invite fisherman (of all people) to be his first disciples? Why does he call *this* kind of professionals to be his earliest followers?

For God's sake, the gospels can't agree on the *names* of the Twelve apostles, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke make a point to emphasize that the first of those called to walk alongside Jesus were fishers on the Sea of Galilee.

You'll recall their names: Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, along with James and John, aka the sons of Zebedee—each pair of brothers supporting their families with their boat and nets.

The writers of these gospels wanted us to know what these guys did for a living—made *sure* (in fact) that we knew they were fishermen.

The Bible gives us these iconic call stories where people just leave their boats and families on a whim (it seems) *so we would remember*. “I will make you fish for people,” Jesus says. And so we remember these stories well.

We know it mattered to Matthew, Mark, and Luke that *we* knew. It's obvious because we know frustratingly little about what any of the other disciples did to make ends meet. Think about it.

Let's see...Ok, Matthew was a tax collector. Umm...Umm...Oh yeah! Later on, Paul would come along who was a Pharisee and a tentmaker by trade.

Anyone else? Am I leaving anybody out? Yeah, I think that's all folks!

I mean, *maybe* Jesus' brother, James, was a carpenter too like his father, Joseph? It's possible. Judas Iscariot was basically the group's treasurer, so maybe he had some kind of financial background or talent with numbers? Hard to say...

We don't even have enough clues to be able to *speculate* about the others!

Like...Was Thomas a former private investigator, given (of course) his penchant for observable evidence? Did Lazarus decide to take up ancient undertaking or make a run for Galilee's coroner? We just don't know! And it sure would be wonderful if we did...

Alas: The truth is the gospel writers only tell us what they believed was necessary for us to know. And, for some reason, we needed to know Christ's first formal followers caught fish along the shores of the Galilean Sea—FYI mostly carp and tilapia.

Why oh why, siblings in Christ, was it so important that we knew these first four were fishermen and not (for example) farmers...or tailors or merchants or blacksmiths or mercenaries or (God forbid) shepherds!?

Seriously...was it just a matter of convenience or expediency? Did Jesus just happen to be walking along the beach and thought to himself, “You know, I really should start checking recruitment off my to-do list. Hey! Yeah, you two!”

Did Jesus just happen to enjoy eating fish more than other things? I mean, we know he probably didn't care too much for figs, after all...**(You fig tree be accursed!)**

Was it something about the job itself—a fisherman's particular responsibilities or predispositions or outlook—perhaps their patience and perseverance—some unknown quality that Jesus respected or valued?

Or could it have been more about the person than the profession? Something special about Peter and Andrew and James and John, specifically, that attracted Jesus' attention?

You know...We so often think about it in terms of the other way around. That is to say, we usually focus on what must've been Jesus' spectacular charisma—his irresistible charm or power of persuasion—whatever it was that inspired these would-be disciples to uproot their lives and leave it all behind and attach themselves to this stranger from Nazareth.

But perhaps Christ was also drawn *to them*. In fact, I'm certain he was. I know this because it is God who always takes the initiative. It's God who calls us—claims us. And so we know it is Jesus who meets us—finds us—wherever we are...

...wherever we are—whether that happens to be after we've just climbed a tree to get a better view of a regional celebrity...Perhaps we're in a hospital room about to go under

anesthesia...or we're sitting under a fig tree alone with our thoughts...Maybe you're at lunch during the school day and see the new kid sitting by themselves yet again...or maybe you're working with your brother under the hot sun hoping against hope that you're casting your nets in the right spot.

In all these cases and in every possible case, regardless of our profession or occupation or lack thereof, Jesus meets us where we are and reminds us of his call and claim on our lives.

Christ seeks each and every one of us out—again and again because we are so profoundly loved—loved and equipped to reflect God's love wherever we go—Love drawn to love.

Make no mistake, my friends: We were created with love, out of love, and for love.

Over the weekend, I came across these words from Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg. She says, "Our culture constantly pushes the lie that your value as a human being comes from what you do or produce or offer to others. That's garbage. You matter no matter what. You are sacred just for being."

Incredibly wise words there...And also, I can't help but imagine there was something about the *act of fishing* itself—something about what those brothers were doing that inspired Jesus—something he deeply respected—something he found in those moments walking along the shore to be beautiful and admirable—peaceful and noble.

Today's my mom's birthday. She would've turned sixty-two. So if it's ok, I want to play a short clip from her favorite movie. It came out in 1992 and it's become one of my favorites, too, over the years.

The movie's called [A River Runs Through It](#) and I think it helps us begin to understand what Jesus might have felt or saw as his future friends were casting their nets down into the waters. (MOVIE CLIP PLAYS)

Now I know it's not an exact apples-to-apples comparison, but I think a lot of it translates, don't you think?

There's an unmistakable sense of awe and wonder here. There are skills that have to be learned and practiced with patience and purpose—along with a deep connection to God's Creation—to God as Provider.

My favorite part from what we just watched is the narrator who describes how the father feels by the waters: "It was there he felt his soul restored and his imagination stirred." And then he asks his sons to listen to the waters, for "Beneath the rocks are the words of God."

Christ, who was baptized in the Jordan River—a river whose waters flow into and sustain the Sea of Galilee—is led to that same sea—a sea that will soon be filled with miracles.

And it's there, along that holy shoreline, that he perhaps felt his own soul and imagination stirring with excitement and possibility—excitement for the disciples he would soon call out of their boats and into his company—the possibilities for what might lie ahead: the ministry they could do together with God's help.

At the very end of that clip we just played, the narrator adds, "If we listened very carefully, all our lives, we might hear those words"—those words of God underneath the rocks and below the waters.

Same with us, I believe: That is...If we listen intently, carefully, each and every day, we can hear those words, too. We will hear Christ's invitation—one rich with possibility and promise.

Friends, I'm convinced our Lord, Jesus, is just as excited to call us today as he was in those early days of his ministry. I'm convinced his imagination still stirs when he envisions all the wonderful things we could do together—together with Christ and together as his Church.

And it *is* exciting, isn't it? Because when we answer that call—when we decide to follow Jesus in our public and private life, we're signing up to reflect God's love and light into the world! We're signing up to be God's agents of change!

When we say, "Yes" with sincerity and with hope, our Lord's love grows stronger and God's light shines brighter.

Remember what Matthew tells us: *the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.*"

Friends, the dawn of Christ is breaking! The morning star of Epiphany is overhead!

Can you not feel Christ's invitation at this very moment? Isn't that your name I hear in the wind coming off the beach?

Jesus has sought each of us out. He's found you—you specifically—us together with our brothers and sisters. Cast aside your old lives. Lay down your burdens.

Answer the call to love. Accept his invitation to become light.

Say it with confidence: "Yes, Lord."

Amen.