

The Rev. Charlie Holt

Good morning and thank you for adjusting your service time. We did have some people that five people that showed up at 8:00 for the 8:00 service. We had some people show up at nine, and I'm sure we're going to have some show up at 11 and they're going to get our lunch, which is great.

But thank you for adjusting for this annual meeting Sunday. I want to, focus our the sermon this morning on that phrase. Follow me and I will make you fishers of people is the way that the new Revised Standard Version says it in the old King James, which was less politically correct. It works a little more poetically.

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Because they were fishermen who become fishers of men. It works. But, we do recognize that the calling of Jesus Christ is a calling where we will be fishing for people, for all people. And I want to I want to think about this from our calling and our formation and then, our mission or our, how we are sent out.

So we are called, we are formed and we are sent. But before we go into our calling as Christians, Jesus says, follow me. I want to think about the context in which Jesus is calling these disciples. It begins with these words. When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. The ministry of Jesus begins with an arrest.

I've been to the place where these fishermen were called in to following Jesus, where they were mending their nets and cleaning their nets. And, they dropped them to leave everything, house and home to follow Jesus as his disciples. And when you go there, it's one of the most beautiful places in Israel. It's a bucolic setting.

It's out on the Sea of Galilee and rocky, and it's beautiful and it's the kind of place that when you're on a spiritual pilgrimage that brings you peace. But we have to be reminded that that that day and age was a time when there was no peace, when if you stood up for what was right and you spoke the truth and you used your voice for God, and you didn't mince words if you criticized authority, you could be arrested.

Reminds me of the first sermon that I preached here when I mentioned Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was one of those who was speaking truth to the powerful Soviet Union and to Stalin, he was arrested twice, not first in 1945, for criticizing Joseph Stalin and his, way that he was treating the citizens of Russia. And then later he published a paper that was called Live Not by Lies.

And he was arrested again and exiled to the West, February 12th, 1974. And this paper that was described as lived not by lives. He says some very important things that I think are very true in our own day. If we are to be a people who are characterized by truth. He says this, it's the key to our liberation, a personal nonparticipation in lies.

Even if all is covered by the lies, even if it's all is under their rule. Let us resist in the smallest way. Let not their rule hold through me. And this is the way to break out of the imaginary encirclement of our inert ness. The easiest way for us, the most devastating for the lies. For when people renounce lies, lies simply cease to exist.

Like parasites. They can only survive when attached to a person. And we're not called upon to step out into the square and shout out the truth, to say out loud what? We think. This is scary. We may not be ready for that, but let us at least refuse to say what we do not think and live not by lies, for just simply encouraging people to not live by lies.

He was arrested and John the Baptist, who was arrested in in our gospel passage was one who was criticizing Herod and saying that things are not the way that they're supposed to be. And he was inviting people and calling people to address their sins, address the corruption and the poor and the politics, address the depravity and corruption in their own individual business practices and lives.

And for that he was arrested. And it's into that context that Jesus begins his earthly ministry. And another interesting thing about this context is that it's in Galilee, which is the northern region of Israel, which is described as the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, which this is the frontier of Israel, the wild west. Jesus, was baptized by John in the wilderness, and then he goes to the wilderness of the northern reaches of Israel.

And it's a wilderness not because of its physical terrain, but because of its inhabitants. It is filled with foreigners, Gentiles, the unwashed, the unclean. It's the wild, wild west of Israel. And Jesus goes into the margins of this to begin his ministry. That's a very important thing for us to think about when we think about our own lives and the way in which Jesus called us, and also the mission to which we are called as Christians is where Jesus begins on the margins of our lives.

He doesn't come right into our hearts and break into the Jerusalem of our innermost places, our religious and heart center. He starts on the fringes and calls us to himself. Follow me. And this is what he's doing with the nation of Israel. He's going out to their fringes, to their dark places. And that he listen to the way the people of this region are described, the people who sat in darkness, those who sat in the region of the shadow of death.

These are people who have given up to the lives they've given up to the darkness. They are lost. They have surrendered to that which is not of God, and that which is not good. They are broken. They are dead in their sins. They're gone. They're passive, they've surrendered. And it's to this group that Jesus begins his public ministry, and he enters into the darkness, to the depravity, to the to the Gentile infested land.

And light has dawned and he begins his public ministry and he says, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Wow.

And then to bring this to home, he, the gospel writer, gives an example of some fishermen which are the first followers of Jesus 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. And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

And he went there, and he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, brother John in the boat. And notice the word. He called them. Same thing. Follow me. And immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus calls us to follow him. And many of you have been following Jesus for a long time for your maybe your whole life.

Maybe you started following him as a young child, or maybe it's a new thing. Or maybe you haven't started following him quite yet, but just think about what Jesus does when he calls us. He enters into those margins of our lives and breaks in and challenges us and says, follow me. And that invitation is one to be then formed by him as one of his disciples.

The next phrase is, follow me, and I will make you. I don't want to miss that phrase. I will make you. Jesus has a plan for your life that will change the way that that you currently are living, and transform it into something different and something, that is aimed at his purposes. Actually, and his service. And he is calling us for his formation to make disciples out of us.

For those first fishermen, it was, it was going to be a three year process. None of us can be instantly sanctified and transformed into the disciples that God is calling us to be. It takes time. It takes some slow baking. And one of the things I love about the Episcopal Church is, is our method of formation is slow.

Somebody once described the difference between Baptists and Episcopalians. Baptists hot glaze you and Episcopalian slow bake. You.

And sometimes, the hot baking and the hot glazing is a good thing because, you know, you need the fire and you need the passion and the and the, wake up call. And, and there's something really wonderful about the evangelistic zeal of, of the Baptist and, and the call to follow. But the process of formation and discipleship is a slow bake, and it takes time for us to, to learn the patterns and the processes of Jesus and his methodologies.

And what Jesus is going to do is he's going to change these men from fishermen to those who were fish for people. When I when I was in North Carolina and Charlotte, North Carolina, we I had a friend who I used to go fly fishing with. His name was Millard Fillmore Strunk Junior. Now, why would you name your son that name if that was your name?

I guess you're proud of it. Millard Fillmore, Strunk junior. And. And he was a priest, Father Fillmore. And we used to go fly fishing together. And one of our favorite rivers was the Davidson

River. And you could. It was catch and release. You could catch tons of trout, but then you would come to this slow moving big pool of water.

And it had a name. It was called Desperation Pool. And it was a desperation pull because you look into the pool and you see these large, massive trout and no matter what you threw at them, they would not bite. And so fish fishermen named it Desperation Pool. And one of the things Filmore and I used to like to do is go to the bushes on the other side of the pool, and we would load up our fly boxes with all these different types of flies that people had tried to throw at these fish and missed and got caught in the bushes, and we could get hundreds of flies by just walking along those bushes on

the other side of Desperation Pool. But one. One day Fillmore and I figured out how to get those fish to hit. And it was a secret, a secret fly that only we tied. It was called the Shammy Whammy. And what we did is we took a piece of car wash shammy. That was my. My contribution. And, then we, you know, put a little piece of peacock feather and a gold bead on a hook, tied it all on there, and the fish, in desperation pool would go nuts.

Now, I tell you that story because one of the things that we are called to do as fishermen is to take everything that we have learned in fishing for fish and translate that into fishing for people. And what Jesus is wanting to do with each and every one of you. And not all of you are necessarily fishermen or fisher women.

Fisher folk. But you have something about your life uniquely, worldly. That's it's what your vocation, your gifts, your talents and what Jesus is wanting to do and calling you and forming you and ultimately sending you is to take all of that raw material in your life and transform it for his purposes. Now, think about what that would have done for Peter and Andrew and James and John who were who knew how to fish but weren't like a lot of fishermen, were constantly frustrated by the catch.

Spent a lot of days where they didn't catch anything, learned patience and how to just persistently keep going back at it. How many times did those men fish in desperation? Poole must have been much of their lives. But then, every now and then, they would figure it out and they would know what the right place, the right time, the right bait.

And they would catch the, the, the harvest. And that's what made it all worth it. And what Jesus is saying to these men is, that's the way it's going to be in ministry for you. All those same challenges. It's sometimes it's going to be frustrating. Sometimes you're going to feel like you're evangelizing and it's not making a difference.

It's going to require a tremendous amount of patience and all of the skills and of learning how to make the right presentation and figure out what the bait is and so on. But now I'm going to take all of what you've been doing with this, and I'm going to translate it over here and put it into the service of the Kingdom of God.

That's what Jesus wants to do with each and every one of us, is to take who we are in this world and translate it into the service of his kingdom, and put us on mission for the Kingdom of God. It begins with responding to the call. Follow me, Jesus says, but then allowing him to make us through his discipleship into the people that he will send back into the region of Galilee, the hinterlands, the margins to find the next lost person.

That frustrating trout that desperately, is causing us to use everything in our fly box, but is definitely worth waiting for and figuring out how to catch for the Kingdom of God.