

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 3rd Sunday after Epiphany, January 25, 2015

**Let's Go Fishing**  
Dr. Kenneth Humphreys  
January 25, 2015

Mark 1:14-20

When I was much younger than I am now I lived in South Florida, close to the Atlantic Ocean and several rivers.

It wasn't unusual for my mother to ask my brother and me to "go and catch something for dinner," meaning "go fishing."

We would grab our fishing poles and head for the Middle River, a few blocks from our home, and sit on the sea wall to fish. It was a brackish river which changed from fresh water to salt water and vice versa, depending upon the ocean tides.

If the tide was out, we could easily catch fresh water fish species like catfish and when the tide was in, salt water species like red snapper, or even a tarpon, was quite possible. The fishing was easy and never boring. It was always good and we didn't have to wait for very long to catch something for dinner.

As we grew older, if our father said, "Let's go fishing" it really was a big deal. Dad had bought a deep water ocean going fishing boat and who knows, on that boat it was possible to catch a really big fish like a marlin or tuna, and on most days kingfish were likely catches. The fishing was good sitting on the sea wall and even better on the boat. It was never boring.

I don't go fishing anymore, more than anything because it bores me to sit and try to catch something in the streams and lakes around here. I got spoiled by the easy and virtually guaranteed quick success of fishing on or near the ocean. But I do suspect that if I said to Daniel Ray, "Let's go fishing" that he would grab his rod and tackle box rather quickly.

For Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, their success at fishing was probably not as successful as my experience was.

They were fishing on an inland lake, the Sea of Galilee, which is fresh water and not much different in size than is Lake James near here, and they were fishing for a living. I think that Daniel would agree that it would be darn hard to catch enough fish in

Lake James to support a family.

While our scripture reading from Mark doesn't say for certain, it does suggest that two of the apostles, Simon Peter and Andrew, didn't even have a boat. When Jesus called to them they were standing on the shore casting their nets into the lake. Certainly, if they had a boat, they would have been in it out in the lake because it is much easier to catch fish with nets from a boat than from the shore.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were sitting by the shore in their boat, or more likely their father's boat, mending their nets. Jesus called out to the four apostles and said, "*Come follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people*" (NIV) and all four of them left their nets to follow Jesus.

Yes Daniel, and possibly even I, would respond to an invitation to go fishing for fish, but what about giving up everything you had to follow an unknown prophet not knowing what the future would bring? Would you do it? Could you do it?

Barbara Brown Taylor said, "*If a clear call were to come to you tomorrow afternoon, could you get up from your chair and walk out the door, without taking your keys or turning off the lights? Could you abandon your grocery cart in front of the frozen food case ... and set off for parts unknown without stopping to call home? That is more or less what they did, those first four disciples. Someone they had never seen before in their lives said, 'Follow me,' and they did, leaving their families, their jobs, their homes behind in order to go with him.*"

Why did they do it? Simon Peter and Andrew apparently had less to lose. They seem to have been poor and probably fished most of the time from the beach unless they could borrow or rent a boat. And even if they could, the boat owner would be entitled to a large portion of any catch.

James and John were better off having access to their father's boat but they too most likely were not rich, not by any stretch of the imagination. But rich or poor, the four fishermen left what they had to follow a stranger. What kind of charisma did Jesus have to appeal so quickly and easily to these first four disciples? Barbara Brown Taylor suggested that it was almost a supernatural something beyond their control, and it was.

Last Sunday I talked about resisting God's call. It is hard to do, if not impossible. I said to you to "Just do it!" Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, for whatever reason, did just that. It was a miracle, Christ's first one.

We often think of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana as his first miracle. It wasn't. The first miracle was on that lake shore when four strangers gave up everything they had to go fishing, fishing for people instead of fish. They had no idea what they were getting into, yet they dropped everything and did it. It was incredible.

If you were offered a new job, better working conditions, great benefits and a big increase in pay, you most likely would accept that offer. But nothing in our scripture reading suggests anything like that for the first four disciples, not at all. There is nothing in the text to suggest any tangible reward to them. To the contrary, what the disciples were promised was, in fact, conflict and persecution. (Texts for Preaching, Year B, Walter Bruggemann, et al.).

Walter Bruggemann, et al, specified that *"Perhaps the disciples anticipated that fishing for people would be more satisfying than the fishing to which they are accustomed. This text (meaning our scripture reading) is occasionally read as a contrast between the 'worldly' occupation of catching fish and the 'spiritual' occupation of fishing for people (but) ... nothing in the story has prepared those being called to understand and respond to that contrast. From the point of view of the fishermen, in fact, they are giving up an occupation with a secure market for one that is ill-defined at best."*

*"Is it even clear that the fishermen respond out of faith? They are not said to believe in Jesus or to understand his mission ... (Nothing in our scripture reading) tells us why the fishermen do what they do, why they leave their nets and ... follow Jesus. Somehow they are compelled to follow him, a man whom they cannot understand, on a journey that will perplex and confuse them, to a destination as yet undefined. The fishermen ... act in faith ..."*

*"The journey of faith begins with this step, as does the ministry of Jesus."* (ibid)

Today, we know infinitely more than Peter, Andrew, James and John ever knew. Even so if Jesus appeared to you today and said "Follow me," would you do it? Would you be willing to give up everything you have to follow Christ, no matter where that took you?

**Amen.**