

Rev. Lisa Schrott
February 1, 2026
Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 4:18-22
Called from the Waters

Our scripture this morning is the second half of the lectionary passage we heard last week. Jesus has moved from Nazareth to Capernaum on the northwest corner of the sea of Galilee. This region will be Jesus' home base for ministry before he sets his sights on Jerusalem, scriptures we will hear during Lent. Last week's passage ended with these words: *From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* Our passage this morning picks up the story with the calling of disciples. Hear now these words from Matthew 4:18-22.

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 fishers. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of 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. **This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

The calling of the disciples is one of the few stories that is found in all of four of the Gospels, so it is a story that is familiar to many in the church, especially if we follow the three year cycle of lectionary passages. Last year we heard the version from Luke's Gospel. Next year we will hear from Mark's Gospel. This year we hear the story from both John and Matthew's perspective, which are decidedly different.

Two weeks ago I shared a portion of the first chapter of John where Jesus called Andrew and Peter. In the Gospel of John, the calling of disciples by Jesus occurs immediately after Jesus' baptism and seems to take place near the site of the baptism in the Jordan River. It not until a bit later in the Gospel of John that Jesus moves to Capernaum and begins his ministry in the Galilee region.

In contrast, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus has journeyed to Galilee, and it is at the seaside (or lakeside – the Sea of Galilee is also known as Lake Gennesaret) that Jesus calls disciples. In each of these three passages it is noted that the disciples “immediately” followed Jesus. This “immediate” action of the called disciples is often the focus of sermons related to these passages. A popular interpretation is that it speaks to the “transformative power of God's call” that the fisherman would just drop their nets and follow Jesus', giving up their bucolic lives on the beach. And not just peaceful lives, but potentially lucrative lives. As New Testament scholar Daniel Harrington notes, the perception of the disciples as uneducated, common men “should not be taken too literally. Fishing was a major industry on the Sea of

Galilee, and the first disciples owned the equipment necessary (nets and boats) to take part in this kind of work. It is clear that the first followers of Jesus were leaving behind a secure and stable lifestyle.” There must have been something so transformative in Jesus’ call, that the disciples left their whole world behind.¹

And yet, maybe that is not the whole story. Maybe it was more about the fishermen’s lives - that it was a tough road for them and they were ready for a change. Maybe they were not very competent or maybe they were wrapped up in a system that kept them down. This week I read a couple of commentaries that suggested a closer look at the lives of the disciples might be warranted. One commentary noted: “...the other way to read this passage is to say, Wait a minute: no-one “drops their nets” and walks away from everything they know without being good and ready to do so, without some kind of deep, pre-existing dissatisfaction, some longing for a different kind of life. Read this way, the story prompts us to wonder about those fishermen, about what it was that made them so ready and willing to hear Jesus’ invitation, drop everything, and go.”²

In fact many scholars have noted that those who fished for a living were at the bottom of the economic ladder. Theologian Ched Myers’ notes in a commentary on the Gospel of Mark version of this text, that “Fishing, was considered the lowest of the low professions, and so Jesus’ invitation was to leave that caste system behind and join him in ushering in a whole new way of living, economically, socially, and otherwise.” Myers points out that the verb translated “they left their nets” is used elsewhere in the Gospels in the context of leaving behind debt, sin, and bondage. ... It is a “Jubilee verb” — and it’s into a new Jubilee world that Jesus invites these disenfranchised people to follow him. It’s as if he says: Leave the empire of Rome behind, and come, follow me — for the reign of heaven, the Great Jubilee, has come near!³ Or as scholar Anna Case-Winters notes: “Moreover, the empire’s demand on them is oppressive: Not only must they supply enough fish for themselves and the empire, they must pay tax upon what they retain and tax upon any transport of fish. Indeed, Peter, Andrew, James, and John lead an economically and socially precarious existence.”⁴

By looking through this lens, then Jesus’ call to discipleship is a call to participate in the struggle for justice, humility and mercy. This is what we hear as well from the prophet Micah, in words Mitch read this morning. Micah lived during a time of major socio-economic turbulence in the southern kingdom of Judah. The gap between the rich and the poor was increasing and Micah was concerned with injustice and political corruption. Micah asks us to

¹Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *The Gospel of Matthew. Sacra Pagina Series vol 1*. Liturgical Press, 2007, p72.

² Salt Commentary. Reign of Heaven. Online <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/1/18/the-reign-of-heaven-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-epiphany-3>

³ This paragraph combines words from Ched Meyer. “Let’s Catch Some Big Fish!” Jesus’ Call to Discipleship in a World of Injustice.” January 22, 2015 online at <https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2015/01/22/lets-catch-some-big-fish-jesus-call-to-discipleship-in-a-world-of-injustice/> and the Salt commentary referenced above.

⁴ Cited in <https://www.christiancentury.org/lectionary/january-25-epiphany-3a-isaiah-9-1-4-matthew-4-12-23>

consider what our response is to God's blessing in our life - "and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" The people of Judah may bring copious offerings and sacrifices before God as we heard in the first verses read, but what the Lord truly desires is not to try earn or maneuver into God's good graces. Instead we are asked to respond with lives of justice, kindness, and humility.

Not an easy task, yet it is the call from Jesus. As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of 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.

Were Peter and Andrew and James and John ready to leave behind a life they knew – albeit a difficult one – to respond to Jesus' call with lives of justice, kindness, and humility. What prepared them for this undertaking? What prepares us? Peter, Andrew, James and John were called from the waters. And this is to where we are called – from the waters of baptism.

Baptism is not a momentary experience, rather it is an invitation to a life long journey of growth. It is just the beginning – not the ending. And "being called from the waters" is something we share with our Christian siblings across denominations. Across more than a decade, representatives of the PC(USA) joined with faith leaders across the denominational spectrum from the World Council of Churches to draft a statement that reflects shared values related to baptism, the eucharist (communion) and ordained ministry. The goal was to manifest more visibly God's gift of Church unity. This document shares that: *"As they grow in the Christian life of faith, baptized believers demonstrate that humanity can be regenerated and liberated. They have a common responsibility, here and now, to bear witness together to the Gospel of Christ, the Liberator of all human beings."*⁵

This is what Peter, Andrew, James and John were called to do. They were called from the waters bear witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To believe that humanity can be regenerated and liberated. Jesus did not asked them about their training or how prepared they were for their work ahead. He didn't ask if they would be able to execute the ministries of teaching and healing, of feeding and forgiving, of inviting and listening perfectly and without making mistakes.

And while it is usually Simon or - Peter as he is often known - and Andrew who get the attention in this story – with the dramatic dropping of their nets and following Jesus - I want us to consider the overlooked of Zebedee brothers James and John. James and John were sitting in their boat with their dad and mending their nets. I imagine them hunched over,

⁵ Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry. *Faith and Order Paper No. 111*. World Council of Churches, 1982; p3.

carefully examining the nets for even the smallest hole and tear that would allow a fish to escape without them noticing. Painstakingly stitching together gaps, weaving new threads in to places that had grown weak from use or disintegrating from lack of use. I imagine them bringing back to life and usefulness nets that otherwise might have been discarded.

And from the waters Jesus calls James and John to follow him and use those skills of mending nets in the ministry of the reign of God. To examine their society and to look for holes and tears that allow people to escape from community without anyone noticing – the ones with no homes or jobs or the ones with diseases and addictions and past histories and undesirable jobs that allow them to float through the nets of our society without us realizing it.

From the waters, Jesus calls James and John to use those skills of mending nets to bring back to life and usefulness all the things that are too easily discarded when anger and hurt and pride get the better of us – to bring back to life civility, integrity, respect, graciousness, our common identity as children of God, all created in God's image.

From the waters, Jesus calls James and John to bring their net-mending skills to political and religious turmoil and upheaval that characterized first century Palestine, a place not that much different than our world today. Tumult and turmoil that caused estrangements between neighbors and family, that made shooting the breeze with your fellow fishermen so tense that you stopped even greeting them lest you get pulled into "one of those conversations." Tumult and turmoil that made you seek out those who looked like you and spoke like you and thought like you and "liked" the same posts and comments and tweets.

From the waters, Jesus calls James and John to use those net-mending skills to painstakingly stitch back together and weave threads and strands into relationships that have become tattered and torn, stressed and strained. To bear witness to the life-giving power of not discarding people – family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues – even when the fabric of connectivity seems threadbare.

And Lord knows we have too much threadbare connectivity in our world today. And we, all of us here, are called from the waters of our baptism – whether we were sprinkled or immersed, whether we were an infant, child, teen or adult, whether we remember or have just heard stories, we are called from the waters of baptism into the messiness of life to mend the nets and repair our threadbare connectivity.

I recently saw a wonderful example of what this called from the waters, mending the nets might look like. One of our youth, Nina Roya, was this year's first place winner in her age category for her artistic collage titled *Liberty and Justice*. It was part of the MLK Art Contest sponsored by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan. Nina gave me permission to share some of the words that accompanied her art. She said, "In my piece, I wanted to paint a collage to embody the theme of the MLK art contest, because real life and

justice is messy, complicated, and layered. The way I made the collage felt more connected—messy but connected, just like life. I added chains of paper dolls because it reminded me that we are all connected even amongst our differences and how that makes us stronger—yet those connections can become weak if we become apathetic.”

Yet those connections can become weak if we become apathetic. Very wise words. You can read Nina’s full quote and see the collage in this month’s Grapevine and it will also be on our website, posted with this week’s sermon and worship service.

From the waters, Jesus called James and John to bring their net-mending skills to the tumult and turmoil of first century Palestine so that the kingdom of God can be realized. And Jesus calls each one of us to follow him and use our own net-mending skills in this world and in our relationships with each other. It is from the waters of baptism that we are called to love and serve, and we are strengthened for our tasks when we are fed from the table of grace, as we will do so in a few minutes. I invite you to rise in body or spirit and join me in our prayer of commitment.

*** Prayer of Commitment**

One: Lord Jesus, the one and only Christ, you called many people from many walks of life - to leave their own ways and follow you and to be your disciples.

All: Lord Jesus, the one true leader of every church, we choose to stand as one church – your church – and to lift our focus from our differences and divides. We will leave our own ways and follow you together.

One: We will support each other as we seek to be your disciples and work together to focus on building community once more.

All: For we must act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly together before you – and each other.