

January 22 Nets for Sale

Mark 1:14-20

I want you to picture that day. Put yourself in the place of Simon, whom we will get to know as Peter, and his brother Andrew and their friends James and John, Zebedee's two sons. Fishing was done at night on the Sea of Galilee. Simon and Andrew must have had a poor catch because it is now day and they are still casting their nets. They want to bring in a few more fish before going to market. They would be bone weary from working all night. They would have likely been feeling depressed and discouraged from working so hard with so little to show. Have you ever been there? Weary right down to the center of your being, discouraged and feeling overwhelmed? If so, you know their emotional state of mind.

Along comes this wandering preacher. It is early in his ministry so we do not know if they have heard of or even met Jesus. He calls to them and says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." What does a statement like that really mean? Even now I don't really know and I am sure they didn't back then either. But something in the call struck a chord because it says they immediately left their nets and followed him. This kind of interchange would have been amazing in its own right but Mark goes on to say that it happened again. Jesus sees James and John sitting in their boat mending their nets. They must have had a better night of it. They had finished the nights fishing and were getting ready for tomorrow. They were also people of means; they were successful enough to have hired help. They too hear this call and it says they left their nets and followed him.

Now I am going to ask you a tough question. Could you have done what these four did? Jesus asked these fishermen to leave their nets. The nets were a symbol of the past and he was calling them to something new. They are a symbol of security when Jesus was calling them to risk. We know how tough it is to leave behind security for something new. Given a choice, many people continue with what they are doing, even if the situation is degrading to the spirit, because facing something new seems to be such a challenge. Better to stick with what you know is how we often face the call to change. Some changes in life we have little say over. We come to the age of retirement and all

of a sudden we have the realization that tomorrow we will not be going to work. Whether we have put enough away for retirement or have plans or goals doesn't matter. We will be done with our current job and will have to figure out how to live differently tomorrow. Or we go to the doctor for a routine checkup. We are feeling fine but all of a sudden we find out that life is headed in a new direction because of health concerns. The call of the first four disciples is not about forced choices. This is a story of men voluntarily leaving their work, their security, what they knew for who knew what. They were asked to follow this itinerant preacher around and learn to fish for people. It was crazy and impractical but they did it. Could you do it?

Before you squirm too much because most of us would likely, at first glance say, "No, I couldn't do that." Let us see what else might have been at work in their lives that made saying yes easier for them. We are in the season of Epiphany. It is a time to remember and celebrate God's in breaking light in our lives. The calling of the first four disciples is a story about epiphanies. Somehow in the call by Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James and John encountered God in a new and bright and powerful way and it caused them to respond. When we believe God is calling us to do something it is easier to let go of what we have and embrace an unknown future.

We can all think of people who have responded to calls by God in their lives. I recall having preached one of these types of sermons in a former congregation. The next day one of the men came who had been in church that day came in to see me. Doug said, "I really listened to your sermon and took your advice. I quit my job this morning." I wanted to scream, "You fool! Who told you to really listen to me?" But before I could say anything he continued, "For some time I have been really struggling at work. I am working long hours, gone a lot and now even having to work on weekends. I have two boys to raise and they are soon going to be grown and I will not have had any time with them. I believe God wants me to spend time with them even if it affects us financially." He was a good electrician and was soon able to find a different employer with better hours. But I always will remember his hearing what was to him a clear call from God to leave the security of what he had because he believed God had something better in store for him. As his life moved forward the change in work allowed Doug to

become more involved in church, really connecting with some of the other men. This was helpful as their adopted son, who had cystic fibrosis, a couple of years later got very ill and moved through his final illness. At his funeral Doug was able to say, "I am glad I took time for him. I wouldn't have wanted to be standing here today full of regrets."

Epiphany is all about God breaking into our lives and calling us forward. This usually means leaving some of our past behind. Why? Because we can rarely embrace the new God wants for us to have if we are clinging to the past. Think about it. If the four had said, "Thank you Jesus and we would really like to follow you. But we have this business. Coming up in a few weeks the fishing slows down and we can give you a month then. After that we will carve out three days every month for you and your teaching." That would have been better than nothing but that kind of response would not have caused them to embrace all that God had in store for them. As it was they spent the next three years with Jesus in intense learning and were finally ready, after his death and resurrection to become his apostles to the world.

Where are you hearing the call of God to leave something behind so that you can embrace something new in 2012? Where is the bright light of God shining fully on you this day? You may have felt this nudge for some time but kept trying to ignore it. You have all of these reasons why it is impractical at this time in your life. God's calls are not always convenient. Responding to them can be risky and make us appear foolish to others. It is so easy to sit in the boat and cling to our nets. The disciples had work and income in a time when many did not. It would be hard to give that all up. Yet they encountered God in the call and left their nets. The challenge God is offering you today or if not now sometime soon, is for you in some way to leave your nets of security and respond just as the four men did that day. Are you willing to sell your nets and move into the future God is calling you to instead of clinging to the one life you are comfortable with?

Rosa Parks, when asked why she refused to move to the back of the bus that day in Birmingham, Alabama said simply, "She was tired." Now no one denies she was tired. She had worked a long hard day and I am sure her feet hurt. But she had worked

long hours before and been forced to stand at the back of the bus. The tired she was talking about wasn't physical tired. She was emotionally tired. She was tired of being treated as a second class citizen. She was tired of being looked down upon because of the color of her skin. She was tired of not being able to eat at the same restaurants as white folks did. She was tired of her children not getting a good education. She had been attending classes sponsored by the black churches of Birmingham that had been talking about the sin of segregation. She had been hearing that she was a valued and beloved child of God. That day was her Epiphany moment. She hadn't planned to start the Civil Rights movement. She was tired, physically and emotionally and when she saw an empty seat she sat down. Being a black woman she knew what this meant. It meant arrest and jail. But she also believed that God was with her.

So know that Jesus continually wants to come into our lives anew. He walks beside us as we are busy at work, in the garden, at the store or wherever. He challenges us to be open to new beginnings. We are asked to step away from the past in order to secure the future God has in store. Are you willing to leave your nets and follow?