

“Fishing for Disciples”

Matthew 4: 12-25

This past Monday, we had the Midway community MLK service and during the service, a woman turned the questions back on us preacher types. This woman asked, “Each week, we come to church and each week, we hear things like we should love our neighbors. We should be kind to one another. We should follow Jesus. But I want to ask you preachers in this room, “How do we move beyond words? All that stuff you preach on Sunday mornings is good, but it doesn’t change things.”

I’ll admit I’m paraphrasing the conversation a bit but this woman’s question has stayed with me. Partly because I think that is the first time that I have experienced a room full of preachers silenced. This woman’s question had rendered us speechless. Thankfully, Mary, the Presbyterian minister, shared something with the group that gave us preacher types a much needed out. But this woman’s question has also stayed with me because it gets to the very heart of our faith...How as disciples do we move beyond words and make change in this world?

I find it no surprise that on the week where I have been pondering the words we speak as followers of Jesus and the notion of their ability to bring about change,

the Holy Spirit thought it fit to bring us a text that talks about call and following Jesus-proving again that words do indeed have the power to bring about change. However in realizing this, we as people of faith need to also realize that these words are not powerful because of our want or will. They are powerful because they are the Word of God, words that inspire hope, words that bring about change on their own.

Let me explain: As I said earlier, this text from Matthew is a very familiar story. It is the story of Jesus calling his first disciples. We should realize that each of the Gospels tell some version of this story and that as people of faith because of that fact, we should probably take notice of what this story is really telling us.

When we look at the beginning of our story, we learn that John the Baptist has been arrested. Now again, this should probably be a clue to us about the power of words and their ability to bring about change. Because after all, John the Baptist wasn't arrested for performing miracles. He was arrested for preaching the Kingdom of God. He was arrested for preparing a way for the one who was to come. Granted, John the Baptist did call the Pharisees and Sadducees "a brood of Vipers" and no one likes to be called that. You don't make friends going around doing that.

But seriously, let's be honest, we know that John the Baptist got arrested for making waves, for preaching the Kingdom of God, for sharing words that made the powers that be uncomfortable. Plain and simple, John the Baptist was arrested for saying words that had the power to bring about change in this world and the ones in charge didn't like it. Once again, I can't state this enough. This should probably be a clue to what we actually signed up for when we became followers of Jesus. But we'll get to that a little later.

Next in our text we are told that in response to John's arrest, Jesus leaves Nazareth to make his home in Capernaum. Many reading these verses would assume that Jesus does this out of fear but they would assume wrong. Matthew is quick to let us know that Jesus does this to fulfill a prophecy in Isaiah...to fulfill a promise by God to the people of God. Jesus' mission is to bring the light of hope, the light of peace, the light of God's Kingdom to the people, God's people who have sat in the darkness for way too long now.

Once again, this should probably be a clue as to what we actually signed up for as followers of Jesus because you see, these are no ordinary words that Matthew shares in this text. These are words given to the people by their God, a God who loved them more than they could imagine, a God who is steadfast and faithful to generation after generation. These words reminded the people that this world does not have the last word, that darkness will not overcome them. These

words from Isaiah that Matthew's shares were reminders that God had not forgotten or forsaken the people of God and God wasn't about to start now.

These are powerful, powerful words, words that can and do bring about change. They bring about a change of heart. They bring about a change of mind. They bring about a change of understanding. These words that set the tone for Jesus' ministry, show us the power of words, words that are given to inspire hope, words that are given to inspire new dreams, words that are given to God's people to show us who is really in charge in this world.

As people of faith, we should not miss that these powerful, powerful words are immediately followed up by Jesus' call to his first disciples. We aren't told anything about these disciples' background. We aren't told that they know who Jesus was before this moment. All we know is that Jesus issues an invitation and the men follow. They dropped their nets, leave a life behind them for another, another life and journey that is filled with the unknown yet one that is centered in the presence of God.

Hopefully, by now, as people of faith, we are beginning to catch on. Hopefully we are beginning to see the clues that point us, that direct us to what we actually sign up for when we accept the call to follow Jesus. There are no promises

that it would be an easy life. There are no promises of success. There are no promises that we will see the benefits of all our hard work.

There are only the words issued as invitation, words that call us, that beckon us to follow Jesus and he will make us fishers of people.

When I hear that phrase, “fishers of people”, I wonder if we really knew what we were getting into when we embraced the call. I imagine that if we had known that this "fishers of people" was going to be a lot like herding cats, meaning lots of work, crawling on our bellies, looking in the dark places, getting dusty and dirty while the intended being which we are looking for stares at us as if we are crazy, I wonder if we had only known what this whole “fishers of people” really looked like, if we might have reconsidered the invitation. Yet even as I wonder this, yet even after experiencing the crazy ups and downs of our faith journeys, we know that there was and is something powerful about Jesus’ words, words that still invite us to follow, words that still have the power to empower us to step out of our comfort zones and go with Jesus into the unknown.

As this week has progressed, there have been many conversations circling around in my head. With this woman’s question about our words as people of faith and their ability to bring about change, with the words of Jesus’ invitation for us to follow him staring up at me in black and white, I came to a conclusion about this

thing we call discipleship. I have come to realize that it is not that we didn't know what we were signing up for when we agreed to follow Jesus. Rather, it is that we didn't want to know what we were signing up for when we agreed to follow Jesus. And this lack of want has made all the difference.

Because you see, for too long, we as people of faith have domesticated and sanitized the Word of God, turning it around to meet our wants and needs, ignoring the powerful life changing word of hope and life. As people of faith, we have turned the Word of God into Hallmark cards and sentimental devotions that make us feel good, sappy sentiments that allow us to pat ourselves on the back without contemplating the commitment. But this week, in the form of this woman's question and the story of Jesus' call to the first disciples, I was reminded of just exactly how dangerous, how powerful the Word of God can truly be. I say this because the Word of God, a word of love, a word of grace, a word that calls us to live in community no matter how difficult it may be, this Word of God inspires hope. This Word of God expects action. It invites and beckons us. You see, the very Word of God cannot be tamed. It will not be made passive. Rather it opens our eyes to see the ugliness of the world. It opens our hearts, opens our minds, opens souls to the brokenness that we would prefer to pretend didn't exist. The very Word of God shows us how we can work together to bring about Kingdom of God here on Earth.

Yes, I'll admit all sounds fine and good. However, the thing we tend to forget, the thing we tend to ignore is that we didn't become followers of Jesus on our own terms. We become followers of Jesus because we recognized the power of the invitation, we recognized the power of the call, we recognized that although it came with no promises of wealth or might, this invitation of life spoke to the very core of our souls and a light of hope was sparked, a light that will not be extinguished by the darkness.

So when we answered the call, when we accepted the invitation, when we responded to the power of God's word, we were signing up for things not on our own terms. No we were signing up for things on God's terms, things that would take us out of our comfort zones, things that would lead us to encounter others. We were called to break bread with those who think differently from us, who look differently from us. We signed up to be agents of change, agents of hope, agents of God's Kingdom in all that we do, in all that we say, and in all that we will become.

We signed up, we followed, we accepted the invitation to answer the call because the power of God's words showed us that it is not enough to simply speak the words. But rather it transformed our hearts. It transformed our lives and helped us realize that the power of God's word lies in actually being and living out the promise of those words as followers of Jesus Christ.

Now here is the hard part for the preacher to admit. Words are easy. In fact words are easier than action. It is easy for me to stand up here in the pulpit and say Love one another. Be Kind to one another. Respect one another. It is another to find the courage to actually embrace the call and follow Jesus into the unknown.

So I give thanks for that woman's courage to call us preacher types and to call all of us as people of faith to take a look in the mirror and really take a look at this thing we call discipleship.

And here is what I came up with when I did just that. I do not pretend to have all the answers when it comes to discipleship. Nor will I stand up here and tell you that discipleship is easy. What I will do is stand up here and share the words of theologian, a pastor who put his life on the line, leaving the security of his parish, spending time in jail and ultimately giving his life because of this incredible life giving, life transforming invitation to follow Jesus. These words are this:

“Discipleship is not an offer we make to Christ. It is only the call which creates the situation. It is only the call of Jesus which makes it a situation where faith is possible.”

May these words take root in our heart and may we find the strength and the courage to follow when Jesus calls so that we never ever forget that the power of

the Word of God really does have the ability to bring about change. Amen.