

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount Pleasant
Sunday, January 27th, 2007
Epiphany 3 A
Isaiah 9:1-4
Matthew 4:12-23

Psalms 27:1,5-13

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

There is an old Christian tradition
that God sends each person into this
world
with a special message to deliver,
with a special song to sing for others,
with a special act of love to bestow.
No one else can speak my message,
or sing my song,
or offer my act of love.
These are entrusted only to me.

Once upon a time, there were four fishermen...

I suspect that if Matthew had been familiar with the phrase, he would have begun this passage with "Once upon a time."

Every child, and every adult who remembers, knows that "Once upon a time" is always the beginning of an adventure. A story of mystery, or of humor, or of danger. A story sometimes of fantasy. A story often with a lesson.

And all these things are true about today's Gospel lesson. Listen again in a slightly different way.

Once upon a time, there were four men fishing - Andrew and his brother Simon, and James and his brother John, whose father was Zebedee. They were fishing morning, noon, and night, some days hauling in great nets full of fish, and some days hauling in empty nets. Some days they made a lot of money selling their fish, and sometimes they made very little. It was hard work, with long hours, clothes that smelled like fish, fish scales under their fingernails. But it was what they knew best, and it was a good way to feed their families.

There was something missing in their lives, though - and they didn't know what it was. They didn't even talk to each other about it very much, but each one of them, Andrew and Simon and James and John, all knew that life could be so

John Powell, *Through Seasons of the Heart*, Collins 1988; quoted in Francis Dewar, *Called or Collard?*, London, SPCK, 1991, p. 1.

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much better. They just didn't know how to make it happen. They prayed to God for enlightenment, but it didn't come.

Then, one day, a man was walking by the seashore. His name was Jesus. He looked at Andrew and Simon and James and John and said, "Follow me." The four of them *immediately* dropped their nets, got out of their boats, and followed Jesus and became his disciples. And their lives were changed forever.

And that's what it means to be called.

A total change of life.

An adventure.

A "once upon a time" experience, an experience of wonder, of humor, of danger, of fantasy, and of learning.

It's a "once upon a time" experience because an adventure is a thing that comes to us – we don't find an adventure, the adventure finds us. We don't find God, God finds us.

It's not just that we're taking a risk, but each time God calls us, it is God who is taking a risk on *us*. What will we answer? "Yes?" or "No."

There were twelve disciples – almost all of us know that, even if we can't name them all, and even if the women followers of Jesus are missing. But imagine for a moment this man Jesus walking along the shore, saying, "Follow me." We know that at least twelve men and some women said "Yes". They recognized Jesus as Lord, as their Messiah, as the Christ, as God-With-Us. But how many others said "No"? We don't hear about them usually – except for today, when we hear about Zebedee, the father of James and John. Old Zebedee stayed in the boat and continued his fishing life – and I sometimes wonder what became of him. He didn't follow Jesus, he didn't follow his boys James and John. Maybe he figured two disciples in one family was plenty – and maybe he figured that *somebody* in the household needed to keep fishing – to bring home the bacon, as it were.

In any case, Andrew and Simon and James and John took a risk – they followed the risk-maker, Jesus. They dropped their nets. They unattached themselves to

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whatever it was in their lives that was safe and comfortable and sure – and their lives were transformed.

We're all attached to something – but did you know that the word “attachment” actually has its roots in the Old French *attachier*, *estachier*, *estache* – “stake” – like a stake in the ground... to *bind* one thing to another. Attachments can be good – life giving, in fact, such as when we feel attached to a wife or husband, or to a child, or a parent. But attachments can be spiritually perilous, as well – think of the attachments we've seen in the news: attachment to money, like the embezzler in the French bank... attachment to power, like dictators of our past and present and any number of others we could name, including a few Americans... attachment to material “things” to the point where they get in the way of our relationships – whether it be a Hummer or addictions or even traditions that keep us from exploring new and interesting relationships and new ways of doing things.

Jesus asks us to cut those attachments. To leave them behind. To become attached, if to anything, to love of God and neighbor – attachment to a new way of living and loving. Being called by Christ is risky business and frightening business, but what glorious business it can be. It is a calling to love of God and neighbor expressed in radical, counter-cultural communities of worship and mission. Communities of grace. Communities of disciples who attract seekers and help them become new disciples. Joining in the risk-taking, walking onto the thin ice, taking discipleship step-by-step and growing in the joy that is God's love.

Andrew and Simon and James and John, sons of Zebedee, took that risk. Jesus said, “Follow me,” and Jesus says that to us. Andrew and Simon and James and John, sons of Zebedee, took the risk of leaving behind their old way of life, and became disciples of the Lord of all Creation, the Lord of all Love, the Lord who calls us again and again.

And we can do that too. We can say “Yes” to Jesus Christ. And we can be healed and we can be instruments of healing. The hands of Christ in a troubled and troubling world. Channels of godly love. We need more disciples. The world needs more disciples. We know what to do, and now it's up to us. If we are to make new disciples, we must say to the seeker, “Come and see.” We must say,

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"God loves you. And Jesus Christ wants you to follow him." We must say "Taste and see... that the Lord is good."

Amen.