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Epiphany 2 – Mark 1:14-20 – What Are You Going to Do with Your Nets?  
1/17-21/24 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

This man spoke like no one ever had before. So when he called, it's no surprise that people listened. "*The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" Jesus preached that message throughout Galilee to anyone who would listen: your Savior is here! Your heavenly King has come! Come to hear the Gospel of sins forgiven, salvation secured, and eternal life guaranteed! But the purpose of Jesus' message was really two-fold. Yes, he came to preach, but he also came to recruit. See, one day Jesus would return to heaven, so who then would carry on the banner of his Kingdom after him?

Well, Jesus' search brought him to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and not by accident. He sought two pairs of brothers, all fishermen – Peter and Andrew, and then also James and John. And as Jesus approached and called out to them, his question was the same as what he asks you now: what are you going to do with your nets?

Take for example James and John – these were just regular guys making a living, and it seems like a pretty good one. These weren't white-collar kind of jobs, but James and John earned an honest paycheck working with their hands. Fishermen is what they'd been all their lives, it's what they were trained to do – *raised* to do, in fact – and it's what they expected to do long-term as a career to provide for themselves and their families. They were just normal people living normal lives.

But then here comes Jesus, and all of the sudden things changed. Jesus had something special in mind for them. It's not that what the disciples were doing didn't matter or wasn't important. They put food on the table for any number of people. It's just that Jesus had a bigger and farther-reaching purpose for them.

"*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,*" Jesus said. Who, these guys? Common fishermen, in the service of the Savior of the world? Kind of scraping the bottom of the barrel, isn't it? I mean, couldn't he have found people more *worthy* for that kind of a call?

Well, that didn't matter to them. James and John jumped at the chance to become fishers of men. See, they already knew about Jesus from following John the Baptist, so they were excited to serve Jesus more closely and

actively and to go into training to be his Apostles who would take his Gospel message to the ends of the earth after he went back to heaven. They knew that this was an opportunity and privilege they didn't want to lose out on.

No, James and John didn't know what it involved. And no, they weren't worthy. No one is worthy for a call like that, to represent someone like *that*, to fill *those* shoes. They jumped at this opportunity not because of what they would get to do (they had no idea what was coming!) and not because of who they were (they were just common fishermen, regular old guys), but they jumped because of whom they would get to serve and who called them. And that's exactly what Jesus' call does – by his grace, it makes the unworthy worthy, and it gives ordinary people extraordinary significance.

No one is worthy for this kind of call in and of themselves, but Jesus *makes* us what we need to be to do his work – he *gives* us what we need to have to *become* fishers of men and carry on his Gospel message today. That means following Jesus and carrying out his purposes takes training. I mean, every day, almost every waking hour for three years the disciples followed around the greatest teacher this world has ever known, and still they needed an awful lot of polish at the end of it. And still also today, the ministry takes training to improve knowledge and understanding and hone skills. That's why our pastors and teachers spend so many years in school, so much time as vicars and student teachers, and grow so much with opportunity and experience. All throughout the history of the church God has been using people to do his work who by themselves weren't up to the task. But Jesus promises that even if all we have is trust and willingness, that's enough, because he'll take care of the rest. "*Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

So do you trust Jesus to make you into what you need to be to serve him? Now that the Apostles are in heaven with Jesus, are *you* willing to answer Jesus' call, to leave your nets and become fishers of men? Especially you young people – have you considered the full-time ministry of the Gospel, becoming a pastor or teacher in God's Church? If you never have, then think about these questions: do you love God? Do you love people? Do you want people to know about how much God loves them? I'm hoping I know what your answers are. So then why not consider how you could answer Jesus' call to share his Gospel in this world that so desperately needs it?

But of course we all have our reasons not to. Whether it's worrying about making enough money or jeopardizing our relationships or being too busy with other stuff or not wanting to seem too "spiritual," if you know what I mean – the devil is very good at whispering in our ears and using those kinds

of things to work against God's Church. But forget those excuses, and do what Jesus said instead: Repent and believe and then follow him, in whatever way you can. Be willing to make sacrifices for your Savior, and be willing to do something big with your lives that makes Jesus your top priority.

If you have the gifts and the desire to leave your nets, I encourage you to think about becoming a pastor or teacher. Give it some real thought and some real prayer, because God's Kingdom needs you! And even if you don't want to go quite that far, you can still volunteer to help with LOGS or with maintenance or with our counting teams, or with choir or Sunday School or VBS, or serve on Church Council, or you can contribute behind the scenes in other ways. You can take a more active role at church right here in your own community – and in many cases, it's really not that much of a time commitment to have a great positive impact on the people around you. And even if it were, I can assure you that it's time well spent.

Or maybe rather you can answer Jesus' call by playing the role of Zebedee, the father of James and John. Parents, will you encourage your children to train for the public ministry? Zebedee was no doubt a faithful man who supported his sons in their service to the Lord. There's not a lot of ink about him here, but it sure seems like he gave his blessing to his sons and so I'm sure he made their service that much more joyful and fulfilling with his support. So will you keep an eye out for gifts in your children and encourage them to use them in service to the Lord, like Zebedee did? Will you encourage them to consider attending Luther Prep in Watertown or Lakeside in Lake Mills or even Martin Luther College, our synod's worker training school... or at least take a tour when the opportunity comes or listen to a recruiter about what they have to offer? Jesus' call still rings, and there are plenty of ways available for you and your children to answer it and have a special significance for eternity.

But now here's another big question for you: what if you don't "leave your nets," so to speak? Can you still do God's Will in a God-pleasing way if you keep on *fishing* – that is, if you keep your job and continue in the career you have right now? Absolutely. If you don't *leave* your nets for Jesus, God tells you to *use* your nets for Jesus. You can still answer Jesus' call by using your nets to *support* the fishers of men. You can still answer Jesus' call when you embrace your abilities to bolster the Lord's work through the ministries of his Church. In other words, you can serve God just like Zebedee and his wife did.

I mean, doesn't it seem like Zebedee and his wife supported their sons' work with everything they had to give? You can actually read about Zebedee's

wife in other places that say that she followed, supported, cared for, prayed for, and was totally involved in the work of Christ and his Apostles. That doesn't sound like the kind of family that was divided and disgruntled about their sons leaving their nets – leaving the family business! – for the ministry. But you know, sometimes we can get that way: "It costs too much! It won't pay enough! Isn't that just a fallback for people who can't do anything better? Why can't you get a *real* job like everyone else? What, you want *my* money, *my* time, and *my* donations to help with *your* work?" No, far from any of that, Zebedee and his wife had exactly the kind of attitude – exactly the kind of encouragement, perspective, and support structure – that our Savior is looking for in all his people.

And for us too, it's all-important to remember that our work together isn't about the glory of Mark Reichert or Dennis Meier or Joel Jaeger or anybody else before or after us. Whatever workers may come and go here, it is God who works through us together as a whole for the glory of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls – *He* is why we are here! And so with his blessing we each give everything we have to give – whatever he asks of us, in any way we can – in order to achieve that purpose.

So do like Zebedee and his wife. If you become fishers of men, then great; God will do great things with you and through you. But if you don't, God can still use you and your nets, too. See, God doesn't call everyone to the Holy Ministry, but he does call all his people to be a beneficial and constructive part of the work of his Holy Christian Church. So how can "fishermen" like many of you support the work of the Gospel? You can encourage pastors and teachers when times are tough and rejoice with them when times are good. You can pray for them and their work every day. You can help them whenever you can with your own talents and offerings, and you can be right here regularly and often to worship and work with them shoulder-to-shoulder to build up each other and the Kingdom of Christ most of all. You support the work of the Gospel by finding your own niche in the body of Christ to contribute to the whole in a cheerful and God-pleasing way. And by doing that, even you too get to have extraordinary significance for eternity.

So is God calling you to fish for people? Absolutely. Whether you leave your nets or use you nets, Christ is calling you to be a part of his Gospel work. God has greater plans in mind for all of us than we could ever accomplish on our own! So whether you become fishers of men or continue to fish for fish, your God wants you to consider how you can best support the work of the public ministry and serve Him in your own lives. So I ask again, as Jesus does... leave them or use them, what are you going to do with your nets? Amen.