

Epiphany 3  
“God, Family, Country” (Mark 1:16-20)  
January 21, 2024  
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany is from our Gospel reading, Mark 1:16-20.

**“ And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” <sup>18</sup> They immediately left their nets and followed Him.**

**<sup>19</sup> When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also *were* in the boat mending their nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.”**

So far the text...

The Epiphany season is all about fishing, fishing for the souls of sinners. And when it comes to this type of fishing, Jesus shows that He is a “catch and release” type Fisherman. The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have one goal – the catching the lost souls of men, women and children with the Gospel of forgiveness and releasing them again to follow Him and **“proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9).**

Catch and release. Released to proclaim God to your family, your country and the world. As we heard last week, Peter was one of the first disciples that Jesus called. He wrote these words in his first epistle. When one is caught with the Gospel message of salvation, one’s whole life changes. You become a **“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people... who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)**

When you are caught in the Gospel net of His love, you become part of a new family - the family of God. You become part of a new nation – God’s nation, God’s country – God’s kingdom of grace. Most wonderfully, God sends you with this Gospel message of life and light and salvation to the people closest to you – your family, your friends and your country! And sometimes, like Jonah in our Old Testament reading, He’ll even send you to another country like Nineveh to proclaim His mercy to a lost people that God wants to save!

The Epiphany season began with the fishing for some wise men in a far off country in the east. They were called to follow the star to Jesus. And they were steadfast in their coming, in heeding God’s call. They worshipped Him, bringing their gifts of adoration and praise. Caught and released. Released by God to return to their own country with what they had seen and heard, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. God released them to go back another way, away from Herod, didn’t He. And they heeded God’s call to them.

Back to Jonah...oh, Jonah. He called by God to go to another country, but he didn’t want to be a fisherman to the Ninevites, did he? Their wickedness cried out to God and He wanted to do something about it – have repentance preached to them by His servant Jonah. But, Jonah tried to escape from God, didn’t he? Can you escape from God’s calling you to do His will? It took a storm and a great fish to bring Jonah to the shores of Nineveh. And vomited up on the beach, Jonah finally began to do what God wanted him to do – call the Ninevites to repentance. Yes, God called Jonah a second time to be a fisher of men. Finish the job. God sends out His call more than once, doesn’t He? Repent or be destroyed in 40 days was the message.

And the people repented. They heeded the message and prayed that God would have mercy on them. The king of Nineveh made this proclamation:

**“But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”**

And God didn’t destroy them. He had mercy on them. You would think that Jonah would have been glad about this. But no, **“it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and**

**he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, “Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”**

So God had some more teaching to do with Jonah about His mercy and love for all people. He works to make His fishermen, women and children to have His heart of mercy.

**“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”** God transforms our thinking, our hearts to follow His plans. So Jonah got a lesson about mercy when God caused a great plant to grow and give him some shade. And Jonah loved the plant, but then God caused it to wither when a worm ate it. And Jonah had pity on the plant. Then comes the lesson. Jonah, it’s just a plant. You didn’t make it grow. I did. You didn’t want it to die and yet you wanted these lost souls of 120,000 people to die. Jonah should have had pity on them. That’s the heart of a fisherman that Jesus wants to make – a heart that knows mercy, lives by God’s mercy and wants to show God’s mercy.

Yes, Jesus had some teaching and transforming to do with His disciples. It took some time. Last week we heard in John chapter 1 how the first disciples, Andrew, Peter, John, Phillip and Nathanael were called. The most beautiful proclamation of John the Baptist called Andrew and John to learn more from Jesus.

**“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”. (John 1:29)** And after spending more time with Jesus, and hearing the word from Him much like the Emmaus disciples did after Jesus rose from the dead, they were overjoyed to tell others who they had found. We have found the Messiah! Catch and release. Jesus caught Andrew and released him and Andrew first told his brother Simon – family. Phillip found Nathanael – catch and release.

How did you know me? Asked Nathanael. The divinity of Jesus, His omniscience was on full display. That’s the theme of Epiphany – God manifesting Himself in the flesh. God knows everything about us and most especially our sins and need of forgiveness. And then He meets that need by revealing Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – your sins and mine.

Yes, God calls you, forgives you your sins and then continues to teach you how great His mercy is so that you would become a herald of this mercy to your family, friends and country.

The timeline of how Jesus formed His disciples started in John 1. The Gospel of John tells of the ministry of John the Baptist after Jesus' baptism and temptation which John doesn't include. But John includes Jesus' first Judean ministry, which the other Gospels don't include. So, when today's Gospel of Mark picks up at verse 14 with the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John to become fishers of men, at least a year has passed since Jesus' baptism and temptation. So, there is a year gap between verse 13 and 14 of Mark 1.

In that first year, Jesus performed His first miracle of changing water into wine and the disciples believed in Him. He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem and told Nicodemus the great Gospel proclamation in John 3:16.

**“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

This is the central message of God's fishermen, including you and me. Jesus calls us to believe and then releases us into the world to tell the world of His mercy that they may be saved.

After Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Him and become fishers of men, they continued to work in their profession as fishermen. Catch and release. It didn't become a full time work of fishing for lost souls until later on in Luke chapter 5.

On this occasion, the disciples had not caught anything all night and were cleaning their nets. Yes, this is a later occasion than today's Gospel reading. But Jesus had a great miracle for them to see that would again transform Peter's thinking and life. Go out and cast your nets again.

**“Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”**

**5 But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”**

At Your word...at God’s word, we do whatever He commands even if it doesn’t make sense. And their nets caught such a big catch that they began to break. And that’s when the real fishing began...the fishing of Peter’s soul. Peter saw the divinity of Jesus so clearly. And he also so his sinfulness so clearly.

**“8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”**

But no, God doesn’t want to depart from us. He wants us to acknowledge our sinfulness and be caught again and again in His love, His net of forgiveness. So Jesus said to Peter, **“Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.**

From that point, it became a full-time work of fishing for men’s souls. Of course they wouldn’t stop physically fishing as they did after the resurrection. But, they would dedicate their efforts to the greatest fishing – for lost men, women and children.

That’s the greatest fishing that God calls each of us to do in our families, work, and country. Maybe God is calling you to be a fisherman full-time or in your special vocation that God has given you. God always has a good plan. And the best fishermen and women are those who like Peter come to recognize our deep sinfulness but even more, God’s deep mercy in Jesus.

Catch and release. God has caught you with His net of love to proclaim His marvelous deeds to all. You may have been caught as a child by the Word of God proclaimed in your family setting.

**“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

**16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:14-17**

Or maybe, you have been caught later in your life. But now that you have been caught, serve the Lord with the gifts and talents He has given you.

There is fisherman’s prayer that goes like this:

“God Grant that I may live to fish until my dying day, And when it comes to my last cast, I then most humbly pray; When in the Lord's safe landing net I'm peacefully asleep, That in His mercy I be judged as good enough to keep.”

In His mercy, God’s mercy alone, we are judged righteous in Jesus, good enough, a holy nation a special people of God. Happy fishing! Amen

**“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**