

Epiphany 5C, Saint John's Olney, 10 February 2019
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11; Psalm 138

S.D.G.

Fishing has never been a strength of mine. I enjoy fly fishing but frankly I am lousy at it; for me it is simply an excuse to be out in nature, and I can find other reasons to go into the woods or out on the water.

But what little I do know about fishing is that where Peter, Andrew, James, and John are fishing it is best done at night. Two years ago, on our last day in Tanzania in Mtwara we saw boats moored in a harbor that are very similar to what has been discovered through archaeological digs near the Sea of Galilee. The boats are about 25 feet long with a beam of about 7.5 feet. They would easily hold a small team of men and their catch. These 4 men along with their fathers, Jonah and Zebedee, and a few hired hands had all spent the night fishing in their two boats and had no success. Casting their nets in the bright sun would have just been foolish.

Can you imagine yourself as Peter, Andrew, James or John? Or one of the hired hands, consider this a 21st century fishing boat and women could be found on board. Feel how tired you are having been fishing all night long and you have no fish to show for your efforts. Are you hungry? Looking for some water, a piece of bread and a nap in the sun?

Putting out from shore so that Jesus could teach from your boat is not that big of a request, but it does take effort; is it more effort than you imagine? Maybe now, just off the shoreline you can nap, letting the waves rock you to sleep, while Jesus teaches. But then, instead of returning to shore he says "cast out your nets" and in the hot sun you now have a catch that begins to sink two boats. Where does exhaustion and wonder intersect?

Peter is so overwhelmed that he kneels at Jesus' feet. Would you kneel or continue to haul in fish?

Perhaps you are not out of the boat, maybe you are part of the crowd on the shore. What is going through your mind? You heard Jesus teach and witnessed the

overwhelming bounty of fish. What thoughts are going through your mind? Is there something you want to say to Jesus, or do you want to run? Seeing Peter, Andrew, James, and John leave everything to follow Jesus do you want to follow him too?

What if you were a child on the shore and witnessed this, how would you tell your parents about what you saw? Would they believe you?

We don't often believe children the same way we believe adults. There is a level of credibility, deserved or not, that comes with age. Sometimes however, the voice of children, the unencumbered voice, should carry more weight.

During our visit to Tanzania in 2017 I was surprised to learn on Saturday afternoon that Bishop James, the bishop of Masasi, wanted me to preach the next morning. Unaccustomed to writing sermons at the last minute the best I could muster was described by the Bishop as "well that was brief". I began the sermon with a greeting in Swahili "shikamoo". This became an unintended laugh line for the 300 people in the congregation because that greeting is to be used only when you address your elders. The front rows of the church were packed with children. I explained that my use of the word was in fact planned and intentional because I felt that even the children could teach me.

We have a way of not listening to children, and often that is to our detriment.

For the past several weeks children in Germany, Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland have walked out of their classrooms in protest. Last year children in Australia and Sweden walked out of their classrooms in protest. They are all protesting the inaction that surrounds climate change. They are protesting to say adults should know better and should start making changes that will make a difference.

Among this group of students is Greta Thunberg, a ninth grader from Sweden, recently she has addressed audiences at Davos, and the United Nations climate change summit. Her TED talk is captivating. She says "The climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change."

Looking at her native Sweden and beyond she says *“rich countries need to get down to zero emissions within 6 to 12 years. And that is so that people in poorer countries can have a chance to heighten their standard of living by building some of the infrastructure that we have already built, such as roads, schools, hospitals, clean drinking water, electricity, and so on. Because how can we expect countries like India or Nigeria to care about the climate crisis if we who already have everything don't care even a second about it.”*

Because Greta and her family have given up flying to reduce their carbon footprint it is very likely that she will never see what we see in Tanzania. The roads in the cities quickly morph into dirt paths as you drive out of town. Access to quality medical care is a challenge, even in the cities. Clean drinking water is a scarce resource.

In the midsts of these conditions are the children, eager and willing to learn. Fetching drinking water early in the morning and then walking to school. For play they tie palm leaves into a ball and have a spirited game with the makeshift soccer ball. The children in Tanzania are like children everywhere, except that their lives are being made more difficult because of the wealth of developed nations.

When we and every other developed nation ignore the effects of climate change the children of Tanzania, and sub-Saharan Africa, suffer. In Bishop James' Christmas letter he spoke praise about the work of African Palms and Saint John's. He also said that “the harvest in 2018 was a poor one due to the weather patterns – the rains were poor and the planting season delayed.” The poor harvest was especially bad for the cashew crop leaving families in the Masasi region with little money for education, health care, and basic living.

Climate scientists can show us exactly how our emissions are affecting the weather patterns of sub-Saharan Africa. In the words of Greta Thunberg “all we have to do is to wake up and change.”

When Peter, Andrew, James, and John witnessed the overwhelming catch of fish they left everything and followed Jesus.

Last August, eight women from Masasi left everything and took a three day bus ride to the northern part of the country so that they could pursue theological studies. Many of

these women had never traveled beyond their village. In August we will meet these women when they are commissioned at the cathedral in Mtandi as catechists, or teachers of the word. Because of the generosity of this parish they have a chance to change, not just their lives, but the lives of everyone that they teach.

These women left everything so that they could change lives. Scientists say that we have to change and leave behind our old habits. Scientists also tell us that leading by example encourages others to do the same. Knowing that others are adopting meatless Mondays', or giving up meat entirely leads others to do the same. Walking rather than driving leads others to do the same. Turning down the heat in the winter and putting on a sweater, or turning off the air conditioning in the summer and opening the windows leads others to do the same. Eliminating single use plastics and throw away cups leads others to do the same. What can you leave behind so that you can change not just your life, but the lives of others?

When God created the heavens and the earth, when God planted the garden in Eden, it was good, very good. It is for us to assure that God's kingdom here on earth is indeed very good. To follow the way of Christ is to care for one another and to care for all of creation. To follow the way of Christ is to lift up one another and to lift up all of creation; lift up in hope, lift up in love.

Imagine again that you are in the boat with Jesus; he looks at you and says "do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." How does it feel when Jesus looks you in the eyes and holds you tight with his gaze. How does it feel to hear his words spoken directly to you? What are you willing to leave behind so that you can follow the way of Christ? What are you carrying with you that you are willing to let go of so that you can hold out your hands and embrace Jesus?

"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." You will be changing lives.

Amen,