

Matthew 4:12-23 – Preached on January 27, 2008

¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, has just been arrested, so Jesus knows there’s trouble. He leaves his hometown of Nazareth and makes his new home in Capernaum, which is about 20 miles east of Nazareth. Capernaum lies along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Fishing is the main source of employment for its citizens.

Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee one day. It’s a very beautiful lake – completely freshwater and usually the weather is decent enough. There are plenty of fish to catch. Right now the sea is calm, but sometimes huge wind gusts create dangerous waves. As Jesus walks along the banks of the lake, maybe he’s thinking about John. Maybe he’s praying, or maybe he’s simply enjoying a walk in the fresh air.

Then he sees some fishermen up ahead. There are two of them – they look like strong, competent fishers. They handle their large fishing nets with ease. As Jesus gets closer, he sees that they have a lot of fish in their boat, mostly tilapia and sardines, which were the popular catches in those days.

Jesus approaches the two men. They barely notice him because they are so busy unloading a fresh catch from their nets. And then Jesus, without any small talk or introductions, says, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

These two men, named Simon Peter and Andrew, who had a successful business operation and who had job security, glance up at Jesus and know that this man is something special. They can hear it in his voice. Fish for people? That could be interesting. And so they immediately drop their nets, fish still flopping around in them, and decide to follow this man they have just met.

As they leave the dock, they take their place beside Jesus, one on each side of him. They have no clue what they are in store for, but they know that this is what they are supposed to do. Others will probably think they are foolish for doing such a thing.

As the three of them continue walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spots some more fishermen. These men don't look to be as successful as Simon Peter and Andrew. In fact, as the trio gets closer to their boat, it becomes apparent that they have not caught any fish. They are sitting on the floor of their boat, mending their nets.

Their boat even looks to be in pretty bad shape. It looks to have a lot of storm damage and it seems that it may not last through another one. In the boat there are two young men, and an older one, and none of them look all too happy. They glance up as Jesus, Simon Peter, and Andrew approach.

Jesus stays a distance away from the boat, and simply calls the men. No introductions or catchy sales phrases. And the two younger men glance at the older one, who is their father, and the father nods, and the two men drop their broken nets, climb out of their boat, and join Jesus and the other two disciples. Others will probably think they are foolish for doing such a thing.

But it doesn't take long for these four new disciples to realize who they are following. As soon as they enter into the heart of Galilee, Jesus begins doing some pretty miraculous things. He walks into synagogues with authority. He preaches to the people there, and these people listen intently to what he's saying.

He preaches about God's forgiveness and about how God's kingdom is coming near. Some are really surprised to hear this, others are excited about this news. Jesus says that when God's kingdom arrives, there will be peace and hope.

The disciples are now coming to realize that they are standing in the presence of someone who is more than simply a compelling person.

And then even more miraculous things begin to happen. Crowds in each town start to gather when they hear that Jesus is coming. They stand at the entrances to the town, and wait for Jesus to arrive. Usually it is the very sick people who approach Jesus first. They don't even need to tell him what their diseases are – Jesus knows. And then he places his hands on their heads, and they are healed of their ailments.

Blind people are able to see. People who have been bleeding for years are healed. Those with diseases that separate them from the rest of society are now able to live a life of peace. The disciples can do nothing during these times but watch. They are moved and awed each time Jesus places his gentle hands on someone's head. That touch is powerful, yet it is comforting and peaceful.

The disciples watch as the people are moved from despair to hope, from pain to joy. What a wonderful thing they have done to choose to follow Jesus. But then, maybe they haven't really chosen Jesus at all. Maybe Jesus is the one who has chosen them. Jesus is the one who sought them out on their fishing boats. Jesus is the one who walked down to the lakeshore to find them fishing. Jesus is the one who chose them. And what a blessing and a joy it is for them.

They truly are fishing for people—they are fishing for people so that people can be restored and brought back into God's presence.

They now realize that Jesus is now something more than just a healer. They are beginning to see that Jesus is the anticipated Messiah...the Christ...the Son of God. One of the disciples remembers what the prophet Isaiah had said, "In Galilee, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned."

This is the promised one that Isaiah spoke of. Those who were in darkness now see a great light – Christ has arrived and Christ is bringing wholeness to the land. And much of this is being done with his hands.

Jesus' touch is still present with us today, in the year 2008. Jesus' touch is here when we share the peace with one another and wish each other the peace of Christ. Jesus' touch is here when we fold our hands in prayer. Jesus' touch is here when we gently lay our hands on another's shoulder as a sign of comfort.

Jesus' touch is here when we extend a handshake to a new visitor. His touch is here when we cover our eyes and wonder if we'll ever make it through this difficult time. And his touch is here when we clap our hands and rejoice at a celebration.

And Jesus' touch heals us. Maybe it doesn't cure every physical ailment we have, but Jesus heals our souls. He has fished for us, he has chosen us. Maybe that's why we choose to follow – because we know we are claimed as God's people. And maybe that's why those four disciples decided to give up everything they knew and follow Jesus.

If you could think of one person who could hear that good news, who would it be? Because with us being chosen, we are given a responsibility. We too, are called to go fishing. We are called to go fishing for people and to spread the news that Jesus Christ is the one who will provide healing for our souls – not money or alcohol or tv or shopping.

We are called to reach out to share Christ with our service – to help those in our town and world who have less than we do. We are called to give our money and our time to ensure that all of God’s people are able to live safely and without hunger. We are called to be fishers for Jesus Christ, the Savior. The greatest fisherman there ever was.

How will you choose to go fishing today? Amen.