

A Sermon for Epiphany 3, Year B  
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## *Call of the Disciples*

One of my favorite pastimes is trout fishing at Bennett Springs, Missouri. I have fished for hours in pouring rain, and been blistered by the sun. I get an exhilarating feeling when I finally manage to hook one and can bring it in. Once I caught a three pounder, and that's no fish tale. I don't think about anything else when I am on the trout stream, but the fish below me in the clear spring waters. I even waded out in the stream, and I am afraid of water.

At first I wondered why Jesus would ever choose fisherman to be his disciples. After a little research I found out that in Jesus' time, a small fishing industry developed around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made his home at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, which brought him in contact with many fishermen. He knew the fishermen to be a hardy group accustomed to difficult and long hours. These fishermen fished with nets and they had to be cleaned and dried everyday or they would quickly rot and wear out since they were made of linen. Net weights made of small stones had to be drilled into them and fastened at the bottom of them. There were certain types of nets for various types of fish. I have never fished with a net and I have to admit I use hooks instead of flies for trout fishing. There are too many fishermen at Bennett Springs to suit me for fly fishing.

President Hoover, an avid fisherman, once remarked ... the surest way to get to know a person was to take him fishing. Both the good and the bad qualities can come out on the stream or sitting in a boat. Jesus knew what kind of person he wanted to share in his ministry and he probably went on a few fishing excursions to find just the right people. And these fishermen inspired him to describe the Kingdom of God as a great haul of fish.

So what kind of qualities does a fisherman have to have in order to succeed? I came up with the following ones: patience, perseverance, a strong intuitive sense and courage. Jesus knew that the guys he had chosen were basically solid. They were tough especially when the going was rough and the fish were not cooperating. He knew they would hang in for the long haul and building the Kingdom wasn't going to be easy.

A good fisherman needs to be patient. It takes time to catch fish and you need a persevering spirit. I have had many a fishing trip where I did not catch a fish, but it was in my blood to get back to the stream. I have found that people can be very slow when it comes to catching on to the Good News. Sometimes it simply isn't God's time for them to catch on. And a fisherman can't be seen. It has been said that the shadow of a person will keep the fish from biting. So in our invitation for others to join us it is important that we present Jesus Christ and not ourselves as the answer.

A good fisherman needs to follow his intuition. He or she must know where to find the fish and the best time to catch them. He is not afraid to try new channels or wade further down stream. Then on the other side of the coin catching a fish often comes as a surprise. You have to be ready

at all times for you never know when a fish is going to grab hold.

The kind of fishing the disciples were doing called for being a good team player since it involved casting out a large net and trolling it back in. Jesus knew that the mission he had to accomplish could not be done alone. He needed to be supported and He always sent his disciples out in twos. Being a Christian is not a solo act since it often involves being counter-cultural and going against the systems in place. Even Jesus knew he needed a support system, others to believe in what he was doing.

Now about the fish. Where do we find them? One of the reasons I became a deacon was because I realized that there were more fish out there than the ones who came knocking on the church doors. I started getting involved in the community where the congregation I worked in was located. I jointed a collaboration of agencies who were serving the needs of families. As a result I was able to get the help some families needed by sharing the knowledge I had of what was available. I discovered there was so much more we could be doing as a church and I stepped out of my comfort zone and went beyond the church walls. I took a risk and started bringing the needs of the marginalized back to church and asking ... okay how are we going to serve them?

So often as a Church we wait for others to come to us rather than exploring other pools and shoals where God's people are. How are we as a congregation involved in the community of Shawnee? Are we reaching out by visiting the imprisoned in our own county? Are we connecting with other Christians to explore ways in bringing others to Christ? Are we acting as advocates for our families, the elderly, our children in the political arena? We need to follow the example of Christ. He did not sit in the synagogue all day long. He went out to where the people lived and worked and before he preached he made sure that they were fed. Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus as a man of action mores than the other Gospels.

And what kind of equipment do we need to catch people? Well it doesn't have to be fancy ... though I did buy a pair waders so I could go out into the stream. The basic equipment we need to fish for Christ is simply our love for Him and for others. Once in awhile we have to change the bait we use. My favorite gig is black and yellow, but every once in awhile I would change it for a white one. There is more than one way to catch a fish. We need to share with others how we got caught up in God's love as a means of hope in this age of anxiety and terror.

Now is the time to go fishing and not just a wishing. We need to be like Simon, Andrew, James and John and take up Christ's invitation ... hook, line and sinker without thinking twice about it. The Kingdom of God is now and our world so desperately needs to know our secret.