

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
3rd Sunday after Epiphany
23 January 2011
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Matthew 4:12-25

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Andrew and Peter, James and John,
these four men used to be fisherman—
they used to cast their nets over their shoulders and into the lake,
they used to catch, clean, scale, and sell fish—
but are now they're called to be fishers *of* men.

Andrew and Peter, James and John were already disciples, by this point.
Starting off as disciples of St. John the Baptist,
when the Baptizer pointed to Christ and said,
“Behold, the Lamb of God!”
two of John's disciples went and followed Jesus—
“one of the two was Andrew, Peter's brother” (Jn 1:35-40).

Andrew and Peter, James and John were *already* disciples, followers, students of Jesus.

So what's going on in our reading today?

What does it mean that Jesus calls these four men, who were already disciples, to be “fishers of men”?

What does it mean for them to leave their nets behind,
to leave Father Zebedee behind,
and follow Jesus?

Well first of all, it means that their calling to be fishers of men isn't their calling into the faith.
They already had that calling, they already believed, already followed.
But not all Christians are “fishers of men.”

Some, like Father Zebedee, must stay in the boat and keep fishing.
Someone's got to clean and mend the nets;
someone's got to man the fish stand and feed the town;
someone's got to be a fisher of *fish*.
And that's okay!

Today's reading teaches us a wonderfully freeing doctrine called the “Doctrine of Vocation.”

Vocation simply means calling, station in life, the place you've been put by your Lord to serve.
It's what you've been given to do.

Everyone's given a vocation—really, everyone has quite a few vocations.

Some of you are *called* to be fathers and mothers—even grandparents and great-grandparents!
Some are *called* to be children, brothers, sisters, cousins.
Some are *called* to be students or teachers, bosses or employees, workers.
Some to be bus-drivers, caregivers, accountants, electricians, and mailmen.
And some of you are called to be fishers of fish.

These vocations, these God-given callings in life,
 are the places where the Lord has asked you to serve.
 They're the places where God Himself serves your neighbor,
 hidden behind a mask that looks an awful lot like you.

These vocations, or callings, are often a bit mundane, even worldly—
 our economy depends on people working within their vocation,
 our *neighbor* depends on people doing what they're given to do.

But on the other hand, these vocations are also very spiritual things—
 the person who sits down and prays before eating his morning bagel
 thanks God for the bagel.

And in thanking God for the bagel, he confesses the doctrine of vocation:
 he thanks the farmer who planted and harvested the grain,
 the baker who made the flour into bread,
 the truck drivers who hauled the finished product to the stores,
 the factory workers in the food processing plant,
 the warehouse men,
 the wholesale distributors,
 the stock boys,
 the lady at the checkout counter,
 the bankers and investors and advertisers and lawyers,
 the agricultural scientists and mechanical engineers.¹

It was our Lord, hiding behind each and every one of these vocations,
 who simply gives you your daily bread, your morning bagel.

And so our vocations, our callings in this world,
 are the places where we are put and given to serve our neighbor.

Andrew and Peter, James and John were now being called to serve their neighbor,
 not in the fishing industry as fishers of fish,
 but as those who would become His Apostles, His preachers of the Word.
 They would serve their neighbor now as called and ordained servants of the Word.

While Father Zebedee was just as faithful a disciple,
 he was asked to stay in the boat and mend the nets.
 He wasn't called to be an Apostle,
 he wasn't called to be a "fisher of men."

And that's okay!

If everyone was a fisher of men, there'd be no men to fish for!
 It wouldn't make any sense.

Everyone's *not* a minister.

That is, not everyone is given to preach, teach, and administer the Lord's Supper.
 Not everyone is given to be a pastor, called to be a "fisher of men."

¹ Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 13.

Something I fear we've neglected in our teaching is that this is *okay*.

It seems we pastors have somehow taught you that it's better to be up here than down there where you are.

We've somehow led you to believe you're not really doing the Lord's work until you're preaching and reading and teaching and helping out with the Supper.

That what we're doing is holy, while what you do is mundane.

Please, forgive us.

Your vocations,

your plumbing and sorting out taxes and computing and farming and building houses,
your going to the store, buying groceries, checking Facebook, and watching Glee!
are very much the Lord's work.

You don't need to be at church 4 days a week to do what pleases the Lord.

You don't need to preach or read or be up near this altar to be His servant and worker.

No, as far as vocations go,

the Pastors are called, put, ordained, and given to deliver the Lord's gifts to you;
and *you*, are called, put, ordained, and given to listen, hear, and receive.

All is given, all ordained, by the Lord,

in His way, by His word, according to His choosing and His desire to give His gifts
through His people.

Your vocation as Christians, as laypeople, as those gathered around the preaching of the Gospel,
is to *receive* all of this as a gift.

Here, in this vocation, it isn't better to give than to receive.

And this is what makes us Church.

Church is that community, that gathering of people:

both Pastor and laity,

Shepherd and sheep,

Teacher and student,

Speaker and hearer,

gathered around their Lord and by His Name.

Having been called, gathered, and enlightened by this Lord,

having received His gifts of forgiveness:

of life-giving bread and wine and word and water,

you're now called to be Christian, wherever you are, wherever you serve.

You've all been called into various vocations by the Lord so that *He* might serve your neighbor,
that *He* might hide behind you as His mask,

that *He* might use you as His hands and feet and mouth to serve your neighbor.

You, like Father Zebedee, are to keep fishing in the place where the Lord has put you,
in the calling He's given to you.

And like Father Zebedee,
you're called to receive the many and good gifts of our Lord,
especially that Word of sins forgiven,
through men like Andrew and Peter, James and John,
even your pastors.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit