

23 January 2011 Epiphany 3 – “Calling the first disciples” – Matthew 4: 12-23 - DT

Introduction

What a fantastic passage of Scripture for me a fisherman, to have Jesus calling his first disciples and them being fishermen!!! I get really excited when we have this passage because there are so many parallels between being a fisher person and being a ‘fisher of or for people.’ However, before we get to that section of today’s Gospel we need to recognize that Matthew is talking primarily to a bunch of Jewish people and he needs to convince them that Jesus is the ‘promised one of God’. Not an easy task. Hence the importance of the Isaiah 9 passages from the Hebrew Scriptures that are used by Matthew to show who Jesus is. Let us note these:

1. Jesus goes from Nazareth and heads to Capernaum ‘by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah.’
2. Also Jesus is not a forerunner of who is promised like John the Baptist. Rather, Jesus is the great light that shines in the darkness, thus fulfilling another aspect of Isaiah’s prophecy:

“the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned!”

Last Sunday’s Gospel also had John the Baptist affirming who Jesus was saying to his disciples:

“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

when he saw Jesus coming towards him. (John 1: 29)

Then in verse 34 John says of Jesus:

“I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

The fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy is how Matthew introduces Jesus to his readers and John the Baptist testifies to that fact.

Hence it is in this context that we approach the calling of the first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. This is not a random act but is in the context of prophecy fulfilled.

Middle

Now to the really exciting part – the fishing!

In fly fishing there is a saying; ‘Match the hatch’.

In other-words, look at what the fish are eating and make sure your artificial fly mimics their food, then you are far more likely to catch a fish or two. If the trout are eating grasshoppers then present a grasshopper pattern to match. Makes sense, doesn’t it!

Now in Matthew 4: 18-20 Jesus is walking beside the Sea of Galilee and he sees the two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come follow me,’ says Jesus ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ An interesting invitation, couched in fishing terminology. It was language they could understand, to some extent, although they didn’t realise the implications of their accepting this call.

In a sense Jesus ‘hooked them’ and they followed.

But why fishermen? I'm not sure but here are a few of the characteristics of fishermen, from my perspective:

We are: - hardy

- prepared for any weather
- not afraid of a little hard work
- persistent, keep trying no matter what
- optimistic, even with a failure or two we'll be back for more
- inventive, looking at a variety of strategies to catch our quarry
- knowledgeable, able 'to read' the water to find the fish
- straightforward, no nonsense individuals
- happy to teach others about the joys of fishing
- passionate
- faithful

You may be able to add positively to this list as well!

Story

As a boy I had a fascination with water and was always playing in it and catching tadpoles, frogs and little fish. I always wanted to fish but I came from a non fishing family. I'm sure my parents didn't know what had happened when I came along, after having had three girls! To their credit they took me down to the local Adelaide jetties of Largs and Semaphore and let me annoy those fishing who happily shared their knowledge with me. Soon I was catching garfish, mullet, crabs and squid. My parents would read a book while I fished. Later, when I was older, I'd catch the bus to the jetties. It was amazing how I learnt from those already fishing. Maybe this has applications for us today as we look at discipleship. How do we learn to bring others to Jesus? This appears to be a problem area for the church within Australia.

Application for Today

The analogy between discipleship and fishing is in fact an interesting one. We can't simply sit at home thinking about fishing, rather we need to get out there with a strategy, with the equipment, the knowledge and the passion to catch fish.

So it is with discipling, for Jesus' sake. Sometimes we bemoan the decline of numerical numbers within the church generally – but where is our strategy for nurturing, for welcoming new people, for outreach, for building each other up in Christ, for reaching out beyond our comfort zone like Jesus going into the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali to witness to our faith?

Maybe in our faith we need to be reminded of some of the characteristics of the fishermen which we need to develop:

- persistence in living out our faith as a witness to others
- not to be put off by failure or lack of results

- be inventive in the way we share our faith
- be passionate about our faith, so that it shows through
- learn to 'read others' so we know when it is appropriate to talk about faith matters
- teach others about what we have experienced in our faith
- know what to say and when to say it when inviting others to 'come, follow Jesus'.

We need to think about our faith and look to become 'fisher folk' for Jesus. Not an easy task, but remember the fly fishing quote, "hatch the match" when you are talking to others about faith issues. Once in a while you may then 'make a catch'. Amen