

# “FISHING FOR PEOPLE”

Matthew 3:1-12 and Matthew 4:12-23

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Baptism of the Lord Sunday, January 8, 2107

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, when we remember Jesus’ baptism. Our first reading tells us about John the Baptist, who called people to repentance and baptism, in preparation for the coming of Jesus. Then he baptized Jesus, and after Jesus was baptized, the text tells us a voice from heaven said, “this is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Baptism is an affirmation of identity. Jesus is affirmed as a beloved child of God. We make the same affirmation here when we baptize someone, with the words from 1 John 3:1, where we read: See what love God should have for us, that we should be called children of God, for that is what we are.

It takes a while for us to really grow into and claim our new identity as children of God, as baptized disciples. I’m guessing it was different for Jesus, but we need time and many false starts and second chances to mature as children of God. We need to encourage and support one another. This is why baptism is not done in private and why we need to keep coming together as Christians.

So today on this Baptism of the Lord Sunday, on the prayer list, we have the names of the ten people who were baptized here at Covenant last year, with the hope that we will continue to fulfill the vows we made at those baptisms, to nurture and support and teach these people, while learning from them as well.

And on this day when we ordain and install new officers here, it’s a good day for us to be thinking about our identity as children of God, as baptized Christians, as people who are called by Jesus to live in a new way, with a new purpose.

Listen for God’s word.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
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.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

As 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. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As 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 [Jesus] called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus 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.

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When I get the chance, I like to sit in the pews, and that’s what I did last Sunday, my final Sunday off from 2016. My wife and I went to church, and we got to sit together.

I know of many wonderful churches here in Madison, and we drove past several of them on our way to Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church, just off of Lien Road on the east side of town. Everett Mitchell is the pastor there, and he is the one who preached a powerful sermon here at the installation service of our Associate Pastor back in November.

At worship, we enjoyed good music. We were inspired and challenged by Everett’s powerful sermon, called “Bouncing Back and Moving Forward.” But most engaging for me was the people orientation of the church.



The sign on the front of the church makes it clear: “The Church Where Everybody is Somebody.”

As visitors, we were made to feel like somebodies. Before worship started about five people came over to greet us with handshakes and hugs.

And then as worship began, Everett welcomed everyone, and with something like our passing of the peace, he told us since it was the year 2017, we had to hug 17 other people. It was a warm and welcoming congregation that focuses on people.

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Jesus made it clear that following him meant focusing on people. “Fish for people” he told the fishermen. In our world today I would imagine he would use different language.

- To a banker or a finance person he might say “Invest in people.”
- To a construction worker, Jesus might say “Build up the people.”
- To a chef or a waiter, he might say, “Feed the people.”
- To a teacher or a professor, he might say, “Teach the people the way to go.”

To any of us in middle class America, he might say, “Stop worrying so much about your stuff—your car, your house, your clothes, your gadgets—and pay attention to the people all around you.”

And to a Christian in today’s busy and stressed world, Jesus might say “take a deep breath, look up from your TV, computer, or phone, and focus on the person right in front of you.”

As Christians, as those called to be fishing for people, day after day, as part of our religious practice, we need to be asking ourselves:

How can I serve this person?

How can I be kind to the people in my life?

How can I be a blessing to someone today?

How can I love my neighbor?

We have eight people becoming officers in the church today. As elders and deacons, they have specific tasks to carry out. They have a few meetings to go to, and they’ll be helping with everything from children’s ministry, to finances, to new members, to hospitality. And it is all very important work, and in that work it is imperative that they remember the people.

The New Year is just a week old. It’s a good time for us to remember our fundamental calling as Christians. Jesus called ordinary people to repent—to turn around and change direction—and to follow him by caring for people.

This is your calling.

Calling sometimes makes people a little nervous, and they think it means being a missionary in a faraway land, or doing something really crazy.

Well God might be calling you to serve in Guatemala, or Equatorial Guinea, or who knows where. But not everyone is called to that sort of thing. (Phew!) God might be calling you to do something crazy like sell your possessions and give to the poor, but not everyone is called to that sort of thing. (Phew!)

However, everyone is called to fish for people, to care for people to focus on people. Each one of us has to figure out what that means.

What is your calling?

- Maybe it is to care those who are forgotten—poor people, shut-ins, people with mental health issues.
- Maybe it is to work for justice--for an end to racism or homophobia or rape.
- Maybe it is learning to be a voice for good and to say what needs to be said—with lots of love and lots of prayer—in a difficult and conflicted circumstance.
- Maybe your calling is as simple as being kind to your co-workers, your neighbors, or perhaps even your family!

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I just finished reading a fascinating book called *The Accidental Creative*. It's sort of an organizational and motivational book for writers, artists, and people who have to be creative in some way.

In the book author Todd Henry talks about various for success, with helpful ideas in these five areas: focus, energy, stimuli, hours, and relationship.

It's not a religious book at all, but I found some very religious themes running through the book. One is about making good use of our time, and taking the necessary time to rest and refresh. Without using the word Sabbath, he makes a compelling case for Sabbath practice.

At the end of the book, he has a section on Occupation vs. Calling, where he distinguishes between a paying job or specific role, and purpose in life. He notes, like many a good preacher, that the term vocation comes from a Latin word meaning calling.

And while discussing the challenge of finding our true vocation, our true calling, he quotes theologian Parker Palmer, who wrote, "from the beginning, our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation, though the clues may be hard to decode."

At the end of *The Accidental Creative*, author Todd Henry invites readers to think about a seven word bio—seven words that define one's purpose and calling in life. He has his own words: the arms dealer for the creative revolution.

What seven words would you choose? As we begin a new year, now is a good time for any of us to clarify our sense of calling, remembering that we are baptized as beloved children of God, for a purpose.

A seven word bio for Covenant Presbyterian Church could be:

Learning God's love and Living God's love.

What would it be for you? Let me suggest a few possibilities with just three words for any one of us:

Fishing for people

Serving the Kingdom

Making a difference

Loving our neighbors

Or how about one word?

Last week, on Epiphany Sunday, everyone here got an Epiphany star, with a random--or providential--word to ponder for the year. I got Leadership, and I've been thinking a lot about that word this week.

If you didn't get a star, we have more available.

Or maybe you can choose you own:

Compassion

Hope

Kindness

Perseverance

Love

And Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

*Let us pray... Dear God, thank you for the gift of this day and the gift of life. Thank you for sending Jesus to call us into new purpose. Help us to figure out how to live faithfully as your people. Amen.*