

Third Sunday of Epiphany  
I Corinthians 1:10-18, Psalm 27:1, 5-13, Matthew 4:12-23  
David H. Teschner  
January 26, 2014

“Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

And

“Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.”

We are familiar with the responses of these fishermen, two sets of brothers and earliest disciples of Jesus, but we still question their impulsive behavior, leaving everything behind and following a man they don't appear to know. They left livelihoods and family, their safety nets, to traipse after a complete stranger. We would never advise our children or friends to act so irresponsibly. And yet our sacred texts – the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke – all describe Andrew, Peter, James and John doing just that without the slightest hesitation.

Remembering last week's gospel lesson from John, consider a retelling of Jesus' call to his first four disciples. According to that gospel, Jesus is followed by two of John the Baptist's disciples after John the Baptist has proclaimed Jesus as both “Lamb of God” and “Son of God.” One of the two is identified as Andrew. Might the other be James or John, one of the sons of Zebedee, mentioned in this morning's gospel? If so, then Jesus has met Andrew and perhaps James or John well before he calls them by the seashore. Since we know Andrew brought his brother Peter to meet Jesus, he has had a previous encounter as well.

Is it possible, therefore, that Jesus said to Andrew, Peter and maybe John or James, “Look, sometime in the near future, I'll be putting together my own band of disciples. You guys go back home to Galilee and resume your fishing. When the time is right, I'll find you. Watch for me and be ready to leave in a moment's notice.”

This constructed scenario makes more sense to me than what we find in this morning's version alone. The fishermen who jump up and leave everything behind already had a previous encounter with and knowledge of Jesus.

The writers of Matthew, Mark and Luke have their reasons for not telling the whole story, if it did happen as I speculate, because they want the reader to act like the fishermen and choose Jesus without delay. The writers know who Jesus really is, Savior and Lord, and if the second coming of Christ is very soon, there is no time to hesitate.

I inadvertently fell in with a group of young converts to Christianity many years ago. They aggressively tried to convince me that if I didn't accept Christ that minute, I would be doomed. I went to bed that night pretty rattled, but couldn't find any rationality around their demand so I continued my own way. A few months later, however, I encountered another young Christian man who didn't pressure me to accept his similarly strong beliefs. Instead, he wanted to hear

about my faith journey, as limited as it was at that time. His kindness and eagerness to listen, rather than dictate and threaten, led to my turning to Jesus and having a life-altering conversion very unexpectedly.

My own experience and maybe yours convinces me that a fuller commitment to Jesus can take time, and there are different ways to fish for people, some more effective than others.

What I do like in today's reading is that Jesus doesn't act like traditional masters or rabbis of his day. Whereas followers usually sought out a mentor, Jesus takes the initiative to seek after and to call his would-be followers. In other words, the Lord of the Universe, the Son of God pursues us. I'm pretty convinced that Jesus pursued me until I finally said, "Yes." Jesus doesn't force us to accept his forgiveness, understanding and teaching, but he will not quit in his quest to bring us into the kingdom of heaven and thus transform our lives.

Do you ever feel that something is not quite right, and you are getting messages from various sources that possible changes may be needed? Maybe you had a gnawing sense that you should be going back to church or participating in something you're not altogether sure about, maybe some doubts about something you are presently doing. Such feelings are almost always significant and worth paying attention to.

Our Psalmist this morning knows that God is continuously looking out for his welfare when he writes in verse 11, "You speak in my heart and say, 'Seek my face.' Your face, Lord, will I seek."

I believe God, through the Holy Spirit, is always speaking to us and seeking our welfare through our thoughts, our consciences, family members, friends, a stranger, an experience, scripture or through any form of media. God seems to use any and every source available to get our attention and keep us on the holy way.

We are called over and over again to come further up and further in to the presence and practice of God's very being. What a privilege and what an adventure! An important aspect of that privilege and adventure is to fish for other people – to be the bait that attracts others into Jesus' company.

The Huffington Post reported on an 85-year-old woman named Mary Mulaney who found the most creative ways to fish for people. Her obituary from 2013, crafted by her 6 children and 17 grandchildren, read,

*Let a dog (or two or three) share your bed. Say the rosary while you walk them.*

*Go to church with a chicken sandwich in your purse. Cry at the consecration (of the bread and wine) every time. Give the chicken sandwich to your homeless friend after Mass.*

*Go to a nursing home and kiss everyone. When you learn someone's name, share their patron saint's story, and their feast day, so they can celebrate. Invite new friends to Thanksgiving*

*dinner. If they are from a different country, and you have trouble understanding them, learn to "listen with an accent."*

*Never say mean things about anybody; they are "poor souls to pray for."*

*Correspond with the imprisoned and have lunch with the cognitively challenged.*

*Offer rides to people carrying a big load or caught in the rain or summer heat. Believe the hitchhiker you pick up who says he is a landscaper named "Peat Moss."*

*Help anyone struggling to get their kids into a car or a shopping cart across a parking lot.*

*Give to every charity that asks. Choose to believe the best about what they do with your money, no matter what your children say they discovered online.*

*Allow the homeless to keep warm in your car while you are at Mass.*

*Take magazines you've already read to your doctor's office for others to enjoy. Do not tear off the mailing label, "because if someone wants to contact me, that would be nice."*

It's fair to say, Mary Mulaney left conventionality to follow Jesus and fish for people. What are we willing to leave behind today, immediately, to catch people for God and prove to be Jesus' disciples? AMEN.