

3 Epiphany Year B
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Trinity Episcopal Church
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People Fishers

Jonah 3: 1-10; 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31; Psalm 62; Mark 1: 14-20

“As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

I know some of you love fishing, so let me share my greatest fishing adventure. It occurred at a highway rest stop in the middle of New Jersey. We'd stopped for a quick bite, it was Saturday afternoon, and I still had a sermon to write, so we were in a hurry. Rushing across the parking lot, I dropped our car keys... right into a large drain grate. After some words I can't repeat, I rushed to the car for a coat hanger, only to find it was a few inches too short to reach the keys.

Just then a group of young men walked past. One stopped, and asked, *“Que es la problema? Puedo ayudarte?”* I pointed to the key. He went right back to his car, and returned with what looked like a small fishing pole, with a magnetic “grabber” at the end. *“Me gusta esto mucho,”* he exclaimed, pointing to his tool, *“porque es perfecto para esto,”* pointing to my key. And it was. In less than 30 seconds, the keys were back in my hand, and the fisherman was on his way, smiling as wide as if he'd just caught a 100 – pound tuna.

The miracle here is not how great modern technology is. It's that this young man, caught up in whatever adventure he was having, noticed I was in trouble, and decided to change course.

He'd been fishing for – What? – a fun time with his friends, a Big Mac, hoping to meet some attractive new friend inside the rest stop – who knows? But because he was awake and aware, he let God transform him into a fisher of people.

A wise preacher, commenting on today's gospel, once said, *“We need to remind ourselves of this obvious fact: not everyone is called to leave their boats and nets, to leave family and place. The vast majority of us are called to stay where we are, and just focus on serving God.”*

As we get ready for our annual parish meeting, I want to congratulate every single one of you for making Trinity such a special community. For having the courage, through this transition, to listen for what new thing God is calling us to, for agreeing to go outside these walls, to join with others – of whatever denomination or faith – to end hunger; to support our children; to serve our seniors, to fish for people.

But where are the resources we'll need for this journey? Look around, my friends, they're all right here – this motley crew, this rag tag band we call the Trinity family. And why has God given you these particular companions for this adventure? Because they're so skilled and competent? So attractive and charming? such perfect Christians? I don't think so. God's given you the rest of us for one reason only — so that before you impose yourself on the rest of God's people outside these doors, you will first learn how to love. This love – made real in this place – is what it means for you to be a fisherman, or a fisherwoman for Christ.

I was talking to a parishioner last week. *"You know,"* he said, *"people at Trinity love to say how welcoming we are, and it's true. They love to say how well we get along, and that's generally true too. But what they don't realize is that all this being welcoming and getting along comes at a real cost."*

"It means really listening to each other. It means being considerate and respectful. It means not gossiping or talking behind peoples' backs when they upset you. It means being humble, and compromising when you don't get your way. It means trusting that there's wisdom greater than yours in this community, and knowing that trying to get your own way can be very destructive. When you have that inevitable conflict with someone else, it means your first priority is to forgive, and to seek reconciliation, even if you have to ask for help in the process."

Speechless at this deep wisdom, I finally blurted out... *"Would you mind preaching on Sunday?"*

Like it or not, my friends, the reason so many Americans are desperate for the experience of community – and the reason so few have it – is that real communities – are very fragile places.

Faith communities like Trinity simply can't afford going through the motions of following Jesus, then deciding someone should leave us because we don't like something they said, or deciding we should leave because things have gotten uncomfortable.

Frankly, my only response to that kind of behavior is to repeat sports commentator Chris Berman's famous response to the most boneheaded NFL football plays each week. He just rolls his eyes and says, *"C'mon man!"*

In a little while, we'll settle into our annual meeting. We'll review our successes, pass a budget, and elect new vestry members we can torture in 2018.

But before we do, let's see if we're actually willing to become fishers of people. Look around you, look at the people we need – you need – to accomplish God's mission, and hear the words of our Presiding Bishop, who said recently, *"Jesus said love your neighbor. You don't have to like everybody. Like is a personal preference. Love, on the other hand, is a commitment. That's the one we get from Jesus."*

Look around. See if there's someone here you don't like, someone you're holding a grudge toward, someone you're judging, someone you can't seem to forgive, or simply someone you've just lost touch with. And think about your family and friends outside of Trinity. Is there someone you need to reconcile with? Someone you need to fish for? And resolve that before this worship service ends, you will take one step toward reconciliation. It could be as simple as, "*The Peace of Christ,*" or as hard as "*I'm sorry,*" or "*I'm glad you're here,*" and meaning it.

Then when you approach this common table, come truly as one body, acknowledging that we all have need for one another, if together, we are to follow Jesus into our lives outside of Trinity.

My dream is that today, we will each affirm our intention to do just that – to follow Jesus, to become life students of Jesus – not for pretend but for real – and not in some whole new profession, but, as the poet e. e. cummings put it, "...*in this one, awesome, beautiful and only life...*" God has given each of us – right here, and right now. C'mon man, let's go fishing.