

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious Loving God, as the months go by and as the seasons change, you remain present with us. You hold us in our distress, you laugh with us in our celebrations, you are there with us throughout it all. If you are gone, it is because we have lost you, for you never lose us. On this day when we search for your truth, your presence, your way, and the strength to carry out your work in this world, invite us back into your fold of faithfulness. Although we may lose sight of you, you are never far; we are the ones who go wayward. Reorient us to your principles that we may find the way that leads to life all our days. We offer you ourselves this day in prayer and in our promise to trust in you and seek out your ways today and everyday. Hear all on our hearts that we may be freed for your joyful service and care.

Gracious God, we see the story of Jesus calling his disciples, and we want to do the same. We earnestly desire to call people to you, to be the ones that bring followers to your service. When we look deeper, we see it is not as easy as the scripture story makes it out to be. We remember, God, that we do not need to be charismatic, we do not need to be greatly adored; we only have to be loving and faithful. Help us not to take the easy path but the difficult path; not the quick path of ease but the path that takes as long as it takes to find you at the end of it. Only then, God, can we truly find the fish that are meant to be caught for your everlasting goodness. We pray all these things in the name of the Fisherman Past and the one who teaches us how to fish still, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray as one...

## SERMON

How many of you fashion yourselves fisherman? What is the number one talent one needs to have for fishing? It is patience. Sure, one needs to have the right equipment, the

right boat, the right location, the right clothing, the right amount of supplies, and so forth, but one needs sit, wait, and let the fish come to you. With the right bait, you can start attracting those fish and soon find some bites. But let's set all that aside and go with just praying for fish. Let's not bring any equipment. Let's bring a fishing pole, sit on shore, and start praying for the fish to come. How effective will that be? Not too effective, I imagine. Prayer only works when we ask God to work with us on the tasks we need to do, but if we leave anything just for God to do, then we have fallen short. It's like tying your hands behind your back and expecting to cross-stitch. When we pray, when we do anything in life and expect God to pick up the strings and roll with it while we stand and wait, we aren't living in faith; we're short-circuiting God's plans for us and the world. It doesn't work for fishing, so how can it work when we are working for God's purposes in the world?

This is the second week in which we look at the beginning of Jesus' Ministry. Last week, we saw the story from John about Philip, Nathaniel, and assumptions around Jesus. Jesus changed Nathaniel's mind and his assumptions simply by being in relationship with him, by dwelling with him, and showing him that something good can indeed come out of Nazareth. This week, we look at the first calling of disciples from the book of Mark, one that is a bit more traditional to our ears. Nevertheless, they really aren't all that different when you look at their common themes. A lot from our story from John last week can easily work into our discussion for this week. All it requires is that we work together, that we be...here's your word of the day...co-creators with God to reach God's purposes. Let us see how we can jump in Jesus' shoes this week to catch anything we can.

Our scripture lesson is short, simple, and familiar. Jesus walked one day along the Sea of Galilee, and he came upon Simon and Andrew throwing a net into the bountiful Sea.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people!” Jesus cries out. They immediately leave those nets and go on after him. Then history repeats itself. The exact same thing happens with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. On a side note, “Zebedee” is one of the funnest words to say in the Bible. But back in the text, Jesus calls them, and they leave the boat to go walk with Jesus.

It’s a seemingly simple story, but we can’t rest on that. There’s much more to this first calling story of Jesus than just the surface layer. In actuality, it’s step 500 of a journey, not step one. We have seen the outcome, but not the work to get there. The podcast Sermon Brainwave points out something great about this story. Our immediate presumption is that Jesus is new to these folks and these are new folks to Jesus; he has never met them before, and when he calls them, they are so overwhelmed by Jesus’ charisma and attractiveness that they drop everything and join him. Probably not. That perception would work with our understanding of Jesus’ miraculous nature, but this is not a miracle story. This is Jesus at work, not working miracles. The setting is, so to speak, Jesus’ neighborhood. Jesus grew up here and lived there to that day. Jesus knew the sights, the sounds, and the folks, and he was just beginning the movements of ministry. This was no drive-by meet-up but another meeting between probably friends. It was as if Jesus and these four future disciples had grown up together, gone to school together, laughed together, and learned together. They were not strangers; there was some kind of relationship built up there. We automatically assume that there’s this Jesus Magic that made these people drop their nets, walk away from their families, and move into a new life of itinerant ministry. It didn’t happen that way in that age two thousand years ago. It doesn’t happen that way today.

When it comes to the work of the church, nothing happens easily. There's a term for this perception that Christian belief will put us on a throne of ease: "Jesus Magic." All too often people seem to believe that if they go to church, that if they say the prayers, sing the songs, listen halfway to the boring sermon, and come back again next week that the Jesus Magic will be in their life and they can do anything their little heart desires. People will be healed when they pray for healing. They will find a \$100 bill as they go walking down the street just when they want it. Nothing is beyond your power, they might think! Here's a more concrete example. I apologize if I'm bringing up bad memories, my friend, but there's fruitful ground for this discussion. Russell Wilson last weekend seemed to be invoking the "Jesus Magic" when he thanked God after their spectacular turnaround. Wilson told reporter Peter King: "That's God setting it up, to make it so dramatic, so rewarding, so special. I've been through a lot in life, and had some ups and downs. It's what's led me to this day." On the other hand, Aaron Rodgers said on his radio show "I don't think God cares a whole lot about the outcome. He cares about the people involved, but I don't think he's a big football fan." Do you think that God made the Seahawks win that game, Jeff? You know what? This is a rare occurrence, but I'm just going to say it: Aaron Rodgers is right.

I would modify the way that Wilson framed that game. I believe that in his life he had ups and downs, and that God was with him in those ups and downs to make him into the best Child of God he could be. God has walked with Russell Wilson as Wilson has nurtured his gifts in becoming a great young man and quarterback in the NFL. But God didn't make the throws. God didn't program Russell Wilson with the knowledge and refined skill. He did that himself using the gifts and skills God gave him and with an amazing amount of hard work. In that game last Sunday, God empowered Russell Wilson

to do the best he could, just as God empowered Aaron Rodgers to do the best he could, but God didn't set up the game or the result. The bounces happened as the bounces do: not by the hand of God but by human skill and human error. No matter how hard we pray, no matter how much we read the bible or memorize scripture, there are some things that we should not invoke God upon, because we will be sore disappointed. God doesn't pick football games, and God doesn't do the work for us when we aren't working beside God. The picture is bigger. There is no such thing as Jesus Magic; it's not as if God is a vending machine that produces everything we ask for when we want it.

When we come to church, we don't invoke Jesus Magic. We invoke the power of God to work beside us, to empower us, to lead us along life's path to accomplish God's purposes together. There is a theological word for this: co-creation. Co-creation means that God and us work together to accomplish God's purposes in the world. I've used this phrase before because it so fits this idea. "You can ask God to guide your steps, but you have to be the one who moves your feet." God works with us in this world to further God's purposes, but not by us being passive and waiting for God to do everything. It only makes sense. For example, I didn't just decide one day that I heard God's calling to be a pastor, and that was it. I had to go to college and to seminary to prepare the way for my calling. I had to write more papers than I can count, I had to read so many books, I had to learn hard things about the world and about myself. I had to put the work in. On the other hand, God was with me to shape me, to mold me, to direct me in all those things I was doing toward a life that is fulfilling and intended for the best of service. My work and God's work come together. We worked together and we continue to work together as I grow into the person that can best serve God's world. In the same way God empowers each of us to serve God well, but we are

the ones who have to put in the work to do that the best we can. When that happens, we co-create a future together: the two combine for the ability to do great things together.

We are the fishing people for today's age. We are co-creators in the process. We have to be equipped, we have to be prepared, we have to do the work if we expect to reap the bounty for God's service. If we are worried about catching anything, we need not be worried about Jesus Magic, about God just handing us millions of converts just like that. It's unrealistic, and it's not the way that Jesus himself worked. Jesus, before, he went on this path of ministry, lived probably thirty or so years in the area around Nazareth in which he fostered relationships and prepared those around him for the tasks ahead. It didn't just happen overnight or in a moment of clarity. We need to be prepared to work for God's purposes and God's goals. The followers to Jesus don't come from his charisma, his intellect, or his gravitas. They come because they know that he cares about them, that he has invested in them, that he provides a message of life, not of easy answers. Indeed, I imagine he was a charismatic guy, but a faithful ministry is not built on the emptiness of charisma. Anything built on charisma falls apart after the charismatic leader departs.

There is an alternative from the simplicity that never actually happens. There is a reality that isn't Jesus Magic. It is the same solution that last week presented. When there are assumptions, when there are things in our way that prevent faithful witness and care, what do we do? We come and dwell. We come and be with the other person in a way that they can get to know us and we can get to them. Just as these new disciples were probably not caught off-guard by Jesus, we need to build relationship. That requires work. To get to know another person, to understand who they are, where they have come from, what they seek, what their calling is in this difficult world, what their fears are, what their dreams are,

all of these things are God-ordained signs of loving one another, and that, my friends, is the point. That is how Jesus called his disciples. They knew he cared and that he would walk with them to find the answers together. It's not the easiest thing in the world, but it is the most meaningful and most rewarding. With these tools in our toolbag, we can truly fish. Fishing isn't easy; it takes time and patience, as it is with building relationship and community with one another.

Are we catching anything? The answer depends. Are we focusing on Jesus Magic, the idea that if we just simply believe and wait for God to take over, all will happen just as it should? Or are we living the way of Christ? The way of Christ is a path of work, of difficulty, of building towards the ultimate goal of serving God. Jesus probably didn't just meet his new disciples for the first time when he came walking their way and asked them to drop everything and follow him. He spent time working with them and investing in them as people before they would be ready to go on an uncertain road with him. When the time came, they were ready; all were prepared to take that difficult road toward something they knew not. Why would we expect less for us? One does not succeed in fishing by prayer alone. One does not become a professional fisherman overnight, even with the greatest God-given skills ever assembled. We must work to hone our skills, to build relationships, to invest in other folks for when the time is right. When the time is right and God calls, we will be ready to respond to the calling. Thanks be to God for the difficult but meaningful way! Amen and Amen.