

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
The Third Sunday After Epiphany
January 22, 2017
Matthew 4:12-23
The Rev. John P. Carr

Out of Hand

What would make you drop *your* net? This question in another form was the question I posed to a group of mentor's in a training for the Education for Ministry program. *What would make you drop your net?*

The exercise that day began with the question, "*What if you had won the lottery?*" I asked them, "What if that money could solve all your issues that were holding you back from doing the ministry that you really felt called to do? What would you *drop* and what would you *do*?"

The situation was posed this way. A homeless man was pushing his grocery cart full of plastic grocery bags holding all his possessions down the street. He paused by a public trash can and noticed that inside was an uncashed lottery ticket. He pulled it out of the trash and took it to the corner gas station where he had them run it.

He was the lottery winner!!

Now, imagine that you are *that man* and that *the winnings* will free you from everything that is a responsibility in your life, anything that is holding you back from doing what you feel called to do.

You are totally free. What are those things that are holding you back? They are represented by the possessions in the plastic bags. What would you do?

The students were given an hour to think about it and then returned to class with their answers on post-a-notes. They posted the

notes about what was holding them back. Under the major headings of their job, their family responsibilities, fear, uncertainty, lack of money, they posted the things that were holding them back.

What would they do if the winnings would remove these obstacles to following their felt call? Some said they would be teachers, some would be lay leaders devoting all their time to the church, some considered going to the seminary, some would be missionaries, some would fund missionaries, others would work in their communities.

The winnings would enable them to drop their nets and leave their responsibilities in good hands and enable them to follow their calling without concern for what they left behind. Some of the callings were lofty ones but most were everyday actions in the community, but all were responses to their perceived callings.

It was an eye opening discussion that gave the participants the freedom that they had never exercised to freely imagine following their calling. It helped them see *how* to drop their nets. The exercise helped them not only see what was holding them back but also to see their calling.

It is an important point to pause and consider. My old roommate in the Air Force had a saying that is so true, *“you can be who you want to be or who you let yourself be.”*¹ If you don’t stop to consider your calling, your true mission in life, then you will become what *you let* the world make of you. The class exercise opened our hearts and minds to reconsider our lives and our missions in life. It was my first step toward where I stand today.

A net is dropped because *a new calling* has been presented or has revealed itself. A new thing that is *more valuable, more precious, more essential, more desirable* than what you are doing.

This is what happened to the disciples on the beach when Jesus walked by. Following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus moved upstream about 70 miles to the area called Galilee. In three of the four Gospel accounts, Jesus meets the fishermen at their boats and invites them to *“come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* They immediately drop their nets and follow Him.²

You recall the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl. In each of these parables the person has found something precious and given up everything else to have the Treasure or the Pearl. Jesus told the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl to indicate what the kingdom of heaven is like. The message of the parables is that you will give up everything else to *have* the kingdom of heaven.

Now the same choice has been presented to the first disciples. They have to make a choice. *“They can be who they want to be, who they are called to be, or who they let themselves be.”*¹

They can continue their lives as fishermen or they can drop everything to follow Jesus and become *“fishers of men.”* They can follow the world or they can find the Kingdom of God. Jesus, who is the earthly expression of the Kingdom of God, has called them to follow, to follow the new King and they do.

The *disciples* have forsaken their means of making a living and their families, dropped their nets and followed Jesus.

What does it take to make us drop our nets? First, we have to stop. We have to stop running and consider how we will surrender our *“selves”* to God to find our calling.

It is one of those *“not my will but they will be done”* moments of honesty with the Lord. We don't have to build a church, start a movement, save all the poor but we are called to do our part for the kingdom of God.

But, how do you drop your net? You first prepare your heart and find what you are called to do by prayer and listening in a deliberate effort to seek God's guidance. It is an intentional search to discern the will of God *for your* life. Then with this guidance you take action. You intentionally drop some things in your life, and pick up the new calling. You deliberately and intentionally become who you are called to be.

For example, last week Tyler lost a great man, Mr. James McCain who lived his calling every day. Mr. McCain always had a smile and a positive word for everyone. One of the men at the Burial service recalled that when he was a boy, Mr. McCain was the acolyte master who always had a smile, a gentle laugh, was never harsh in correction but loving and patient. He remembered literally looking up in admiration at him one day and wanting to be that kind of man.

Mr. McCain would send "cheer up cards to widows and other acts of kindness that were only later discovered. He went about loving people quietly and without recognition. He wordlessly preached a Gospel of love by his life and actions.

You see, Mr. McCain followed the Lord and had found his calling. He had found his calling in being kind to people and offering a generosity of spirit, humor and love that was contagious.

The disciples gave it all up to follow Jesus.

They left it all behind and were *all in* for Him.

That is what Jesus is calling us to do in ways great and small.

He wants us to be *all in* for Him.

Whether it is being on the altar guild, taking food to a shut in friend, clothes to someone you do not know, or helping someone pay the rent, in life, Jesus wants us to be *all in* for Him.

He wants us to be His hands, His voice, His eyes, His love in the world around us.

It is time for us, like the disciples, to drop our nets and follow, and in following, learn to be Christ in the world.

Amen

1. Jim Dillon USAF, 1975

2.

- John 1:40-42, Andrew, Peter and (John?), Philip and Nathanael. They leave John the Baptist and follow Jesus in time before Galilee
- Mt. 4:18-20, Andrew and Peter, James and John sons of Zebedee in Galilee on the Sea, at once they left their nets and followed him.
- Mk. 1:16-20, Simon, and his brother Andrew, at once they left their nets and followed him. James and John sons of Zebedee, left their father in the boat and followed him.
- Lk. 5:2-11 Simon Peter, James and John sons of Zebedee, left everything and followed him.