

My dad loved to fish. He loved being on the water, casting his line and the thrill of that moment when the line jerks tight and then the dance reeling in and giving slack, making sure the line didn't break or that fish didn't throw the hook. He also loved shopping for fishing supplies, especially lures. He was never satisfied with the tackle he already owned, and some of it never made it out of the package. I think he convinced himself that if he could just find the right lure, he would magically catch a ton of enormous fish. I remember the summer he bought a fish finder and we would travel all over the lake looking for that magic spot where all the fish were hanging out just waiting to be caught. You see my dad loved to fish, but he wasn't particularly good at. He never really took the time or made the effort to learn. Like me, he also lived with Attention Deficit Disorder, but went undiagnosed for most of his life. This resulted in short spurts of trying something new (like fly-fishing or a new type of tackle), getting bored, and then trying something else. He was also notorious for going to one place on the lake, fishing there for 5-10 minutes and if nothing bit, moving somewhere else over and over. Nevertheless, we went fishing every summer during vacation, and sometimes we got lucky and caught something.

But with all of this fishing, we never fished with nets like it is described in our scripture this morning. I could be wrong, but I don't think most people who fish for recreation use nets. Instead, the fishing is done with a pole and line and a hook. As I pondered the metaphor Jesus uses to recruit his first 4 disciples in Mark's gospel, to make them fishers of people, it bothered me. In my experience with my dad, fishing means tricking the fish into thinking they are getting food by using bait or a lure, catching them with a hook, reeling them in, and then they become the dinner. This didn't feel like a good metaphor for how the disciples might share the good news with others. But Ken kindly reminded me that the disciples didn't fish with lures or bait, they were fishing with nets. With nets there is no tricking. The fish are simply minding their own business, when suddenly they are suddenly scooped up out of the water. I love that the net scoops up everything type of fish that might be swimming where the net is cast. The net does not discriminate. If you are a fish like the cartoon clownfish Nemo, swimming around with one flipper that is smaller than the other, the net doesn't care. I think that's

a great metaphor for how disciples then and now are expected to share God's good news – without discrimination. Just through the net of God's love out into the world and bring all the fish into the boat.

Now, no metaphor is perfect and there are some issues with the fact that the fish have no choice about whether or not they are scooped up. But then I wonder if that isn't sometimes true for humans experiencing the movement and presence of God in the world. There have been times in my life when I was minding my own business, swimming around my little corner of the lake, and an experience of the divine, or someone's testimony of their own experience descends upon me like a net out of the sky. I am taken by surprise and find myself in a new place.

But let's shift from the experience of the fish to what it means to be the fishers. First I think we have to look at the proclamation Jesus makes at the beginning of the scripture. It reads "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." Ah, one of my favorite bible words: "repent." What does this word bring to mind for you? For a lot of people the word "repent" brings up images of hellfire and brimstone preachers. Preachers who emphatically and loudly proclaim that you must repent of your sin or you will go to hell. The word repent seems to come out of their mouths dripping with judgement and self-righteousness. Hearing the word repent being read in scripture or being yelled out by sidewalk preachers in San Francisco, would make me feel embarrassed to be a Christian. Then I learned more about the ancient Greek word "metanoeo" which gets translated as "repent." Metanoeo means to change one's mind or purpose. Some commentators translate the concept of repentance as changing one's way of thinking, a re-orientation of one's life in a way that puts God and God's ways at the center. Repentance means acknowledging those parts of our lives that don't align with the way God would have us live and then changing our lives in order to follow in the ways of Jesus. This concept of repentance not only makes more sense to me, I find it inspiring.

Jesus is calling on people to reorient their lives. To change the status quo. To reject the idea that empire and corrupt human power and greed is what rules our lives and instead to believe the good news that God is near. I have been thinking a lot this week about what this kind of reorientation might look like in this time and place. What does it mean to believe the good news in the United States in 2018? Did any of you watch Saturday Night Live last night? There was a skit that centered on a Game Show called "What Even Matters Anymore?" In the show, the hostess states something the president said or did and the contestants have to answer if it matters anymore. Basically, do these statements or actions by the president have consequences for him and the administration. Spoiler alert for anyone who hasn't seen it, none of the scenarios presented by the game show host mattered enough to result in consequences. The host begins by saying "The President of the United States refers to African countries as poo-poo holes, and says all Haitians have AIDS," Chastain begins, as Elder. "Does it even matter anymore?" One contestant answers, "That's really bad. That has to matter, yes." But her answer is met with a jarring BUZZZ indicating that she's wrong. The host responds "mmmmm, actually that does not matter. Zero consequences and everyone just moves on." By the end of the skit the game show host is so depressed that she is chugging wine from the bottle and asks for hugs from the contestants.

Regardless of how you feel about the current president, the skit points to a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness felt by many people in the country.

But we are called to repent, re-orient our lives away from believing that there is no hope or that we are helpless. We are called to believe the good news that God is among us, within us, between us, inviting us to take one more step forward even if we can't see the path ahead. I think this is what it means to become fishers of people in 2018. It means showing people in our everyday interactions that we reject the seductive nature of cynicism, fear, apathy, and believe the good news that God is still at work in the world. It means helping people notice when good stuff happens around them. It means showing up in the world with a net of God's love that includes everyone instead of a baited hook or lure that is designed to trick a particular type of fish into taking the bait. It means taking on this new life orientation as part of our identity instead of treating it like a hobby that we will do in our free time if we get bored.

May we listen for the voice calling out to us saying "follow me!" May we respond by re-orientating ourselves to the ways of God. And may we cast a net of love so wide that the presence of God is so palpable that fear and hopelessness is replaced with an eternal faith and unbridled hope.