**Fishing for People**

**January 24, 2021 Epiphany 3**

Mark 1: 14-20 Russell Mitchell-Walker

I am not much of a fisher. I grew up going to The Pas, Manitoba where my Uncle and Aunt lived and we always fished there. It was a very good place to fish, and we could catch lots, but it wasn’t something I caught onto. I didn’t like dealing with worms and bait. I did enjoy the excitement and thrill of hooking a fish but I hated touching them, cleaning them and especially having to kill the fish.

Fishing is a metaphor for death, because once you catch a fish, they die, unless you release it. So what is Jesus getting at when he tells the disciples to “follow me and I will make you fishers of people”? In the Old Testament, the prophets used fishing as a metaphor to represent judgement on the rich and powerful, upon those who did not care for the poor and oppressed. Ched Meyers, a biblical scholar, says: “Jesus is inviting common folk to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege.” Jesus has proclaimed that the kingdom of God has come near, and is not calling these fishers out of a hostile life of this world to a better life in God’s heavenly kingdom, but to engage in this life here, to address the injustices and hostility of this world and work to make it a better place for all. This is the Kingdom of God coming near, a place of justice and peace for all, here and now.

So, one of the important messages of Jesus’ coming, which has been lost over the years in some traditions, is that this kingdom that Jesus speaks about is not heaven, up in the sky, but the reign of God, here on earth. It is something that as followers we are called to worked toward creating and celebrate when we experience it. We can catch glimpses of this kingdom, of God’s shalom community, when we experience a moment of peace or justice. How do we experience this?

The Kingdom of God comes near when we know we are loved and accepted as we are.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we love our neighbour as ourselves

The Kingdom of God comes near when we can love our enemies.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we have no enemies

The Kingdom of God comes near when we experience a peace through reconciliation.

The Kingdom of God comes near when there is no war.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we can celebrate and honour one another’s’ differences and there is equity for everyone.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we make choices to care for the earth and address climate change.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we put people’s health and welfare before the economy or money.

The Kingdom of God comes near when we make choices that lead to there being enough for all.

The Kingdom of God comes near when there is affordable housing for the poor.

The Kingdom of God comes near when there is a guaranteed living income for all.

The Kingdom of God comes near when love wins.

Now some of these examples may seem like unrealistic challenges, however, that does not mean we don’t work towards them. Jesus called everyday people, fishermen to follow him. But not all followers journeyed and travelled with him. There were a few who had this special calling but the large majority of his followers were at home in their local reality, living out his call to love and blessing. This is not unlike us. Each of us seek to follow Jesus in our own contexts and discern what that means for our home and work life. For some it is more challenging than for others but we know God is with us when we are faced with these challenges. Sometimes we are faced with ethical decisions in our work or everyday life that can be difficult. Do we continue to buy a product that we have learned does not treat its’ workers justly or fairly? Do we support a business deal our company is involved in that is dishonouring of Indigenous people’s rights? The city of Regina is faced with such an [ethical challenge](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/city-of-regina-fossil-fuel-advertised-sponsorship-1.5881378) presently. The City Council’s executive committee has approved a motion that would ban advertising or sponsorship from any group “whose business is principally derived from the sale or production of fossil fuels”. It is seen as consistent with the City’s commitment to being net zero emissions by 2050. However, the decision, yet to be ratified by the City Council, has caused some controversy, including the Premier, Scott Moe, condemning it and threatening to withdraw Saskpower and Saskenergy sponsorships and surcharges. Does it hurt or disrespect those who work in the industry? Does accepting such sponsorship or advertising present an image inconsistent with the City’s values and commitments? These are the kinds of challenges we can face in our day to day lives as we discern what is faithful. What do you think? Jesus never said discipleship and following him would be easy!

I believe this is why it is important to be in community as a group of believers. Gathering together can help us discern together what is faithful. Throughout this pandemic, together through our leadership, we have decided that the best course is to remain online, until things feel safe. We have been cautious to protect our most vulnerable members. We have made these decisions together, in community, in prayer and guided by our faith. We are not alone, thanks be to God.

Jesus called the disciples from their daily jobs and they immediately left their nets and went with Jesus. There must have been something very compelling for them to do so. Given what we know about Jesus in the stories, it is not hard to believe that there was something compelling. They may have heard about Jesus and been honoured and excited to be invited to follow him, to walk with him. This may have been their first encounter or hearing of him, and yet they somehow knew the importance of this invitation. Maybe they caught his reference of fishers of people as a metaphor for addressing the death in the world, the injustices and hope for making the world a better place. They would have known and experienced much injustice by those in power. What would you do, if you were them? Would you leave family and work to follow this Jesus, to be fishers of people?

May we draw on the hope that with Jesus, the Kingdom of God is near that we may do our part to make it so. As followers of this Jesus, may we seek to address injustice where we can, and make the world a better place for all. May we have the strength and resolve to make faithful decisions in our day to day life, as we seek to follow Jesus.