

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

January 26, 2020, The 3d Sunday of Epiphany/3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 27:1, 4-9, Matthew 4:12-23

CALLED

For this morning's sermon I'd like to invite you to listen with me to one voice from the time of Jesus.

Intrusive! Disruptive! Life-Changing! (see Boring, Craddock, p. 24.2.9)

Those are words I want to use to tell you about what happened to my husband Peter. I'm sure you know of Peter, the disciple of Jesus.

But my story has barely been told. In fact, I'm only hinted at in the Gospels you read, and my name is not given.

I'm part of one of the many stories of Jesus healing someone who was sick.

You may not even remember it. But Matthew, Mark and Luke did when they wrote their gospels.
(Matt 8:14-17, Mark 1:29-34, Luke 4:38-41.)

My mother, Peter's mother-in-law, whose name is also not known, outside of our family and our village, was very sick. She lived with us and one day she had a high fever, and nothing seemed to be helping it. We were frightened by how sick she was.

When Jesus heard this, he came to our home,
and took her by the hand and healed her of her fevers.

That story is the first and last time you hear about my mother, and by implication about me.

You may not know our names, but you can be assured that Jesus of Nazareth changed our lives too.

But the story I want to tell you today is about the beginning of my husband Peter's journey. To understand his journey, it helps to know about where we come from, the village of Capernaum. We're a small fishing village on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. We're remembered as the place where Jesus made his home for his last three years on earth.

But before he came, with his intrusive, disruptive, life-changing invitations, we were just a small fishing village along the rock-strewn shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The Sea is really a freshwater inland lake fed by the Jordan River that begins up on the border between Lebanon and Syria, and flows down into the Sea of Galilee.

It then flows down through Israel and into the Dead Sea.

When you think of our Sea, I don't want you to be thinking of a big pond. The Sea of Galilee is 7 miles wide at its widest point, and 13 miles long.

While the Sea of Galilee is inland,
it is a deep and wide enough that when the winds came up and the storms rage,
the waves and storms can scare even the most seasoned fisherman.

My husband Peter, and his brother Andrew, fished together on the sea, as did many families in our village. James and John, the sons of Zebedee also fished from our village.

And a fifth disciple, Matthew the tax collector lived and worked in Capernaum,
but that is a story for another day.

I wish you could see the beauty of an early morning along the Sea. The sun rises up over Golan hills, painting the morning sky, and then creating a path across the water. On warm days, a

mist sometimes rises on the Sea.

If you climb partway up the hillside on a calm day, you can see the fishermen's small boats dotting the water. Their nets are circular with weights around the edges. The nets are thrown into the water from the shore, or from the boats. The weights then pull the nets down into the water and close off the net, trapping the fish inside.

On those quiet mornings, looking out over the Sea, you could see the outlines of those circle nets before they sank. (Israel trip, Feb. 1999)

At the end of the day you see the men along the shore, laughing, swapping stories of their catch, washing and mending their nets so they'd be ready for the next day.

You'd sometimes see the village cats sitting nearby, waiting for the cleaning of the fish and the nets to be finished, so they could move in. Sometimes I'd catch Peter tossing a bit of fish to the cats. (Black Sea, Israel trip 1999, Jordan 2005)

Peter and Andrew had one of those boats out on the Sea.
They had a life. They had a business.

We had a life.

We had a home, my mother lived with us.

Capernaum was our home.

But after the death of John the Baptizer, it also became the home of Jesus of Nazareth and that changed everything. Because he wasn't just a roaming preacher and teacher from a village smaller than our own. He was like no one we had ever seen or heard before, and that changed the world.

We had a life. We thought it would be our life until our sons took over the family business. We thought we'd never leave Capernaum where generations upon generations of our family had lived. But Jesus came and made his home in our village. Wherever he went in those early days he would say: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

It sounded like words from a prophet in our Scriptures. He was telling us that God wasn't just far away in Heaven. Somehow when Jesus was there with us, the Kingdom of God was with us, through him.

In Jesus, God wasn't far away, but right there with us.

The Kingdom of Heaven was somehow breaking into our world in Jesus.

The Kingdom of God was with us;

somehow God's very self was with us. (Connections, p. 207.2.2)

We knew, deep in our hearts, that the stories we kept hearing were true. When John the Baptizer baptized him in the Jordan River, God showed us who Jesus was. We heard the stories. As Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove from Heaven, and God spoke from Heaven saying, "This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had the power to heal the sick, to cast out evil, to speak God's love to everyone, even people you would never expect. We heard the stories later.

We witnessed some of those stories ourselves. My own mother was healed by Jesus.

Other miracles took place in and around Capernaum.

But on the shore that day that changed everything, Peter didn't know the stories yet. He and Andrew were casting their nets from the shore that day.

It was just another day, like any other day. It was just a normal day.

And Jesus came up to them and said: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

And now I can understand what that was like for them, but at the time all that I was told was that immediately Peter and Andrew dropped their nets there at the side of the Sea, and they followed Jesus.

They dropped their nets,
they dropped life as they had known it,
life as we had known it,
and they followed Jesus.

And it was hard for me to understand.

The three of them walked a little farther along the shore of the Sea, and there were James and John, with their father Zebedee. They were sitting in their boat near the shore, and they were mending their nets, getting ready for the next day.

Again, Jesus spoke the words: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

And immediately James and John dropped their nets into the boat, left their father there, sloshed through the shallow waters,
and joined Peter and Andrew and Jesus there on the shore.

Immediately, these four men, and later 8 more, dropped everything, and followed Jesus to spread the news of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

It was like the way God had called the prophets of our faith long ago. Elijah calling Elisha, God calling Isaiah and Jeremiah. And now Jesus calling Peter and Andrew and the rest of the twelve. Those prophets' lives had been changed long ago.

And now the lives of the twelve were changed, and the lives of all of us in Capernaum, in Galilee, in Israel and beyond, were changed forever. (See Connections, p. 205.2.7)

The Kingdom of Heaven had come near. Intrusive! Disruptive! Life-Changing!
When Jesus says "Follow Me," the world changes if you follow him.

They didn't ask to be called. They hadn't prepared for the life Jesus had planned for them.

But there was something in them that was listening,
and there was something in the way Jesus called them that their hearts could hear.
(Connections p. 205.2.0f)

So, they left that day, left to follow Jesus. For three years Jesus taught them how to fish for people. Jesus taught them how to cast out a different kind of net, because they watched him do it all the time.

He cast nets of words and taught the crowds that God was love. He cast out nets of healing and hope and compassionate care to all kinds of people.

In time someone realized our prophet Isaiah had spoken about the days we were living. The words are like a map to our home. In 9th chapter of our prophet Isaiah you find these words: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—"

That was us, there in the region of Galilee. Land of the tribe of Zebulun, the region where Nazareth was, the town Jesus was raised in.

Naphtali, the region where Capernaum was.

There we were on the road by the sea, the trade route from Damascus to Egypt that went through Capernaum.

Near to the Jordan river that flowed into the Sea of Galilee, just east of our village.

Our region of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, were the first of the tribes and regions taken into exile by the Assyrians hundreds of years ago. The first of the tribes to know the darkness of despair and loss and death.

Our prophet Isaiah continued with these words: “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

Jesus was the Light that came and dawned and shined on Capernaum,
came and shined in Israel,
and then to lands and times far beyond our own.

Jesus came and brought “a reversal” to all life that had gone before. He was disruptive, intrusive and he changed lives and he changed the world.

He shined the Light of God, and Heaven come to earth in him. God came near to us all.

(Connections, p. 204.2.0 and 205.1.2)

He taught my husband Peter and my brother-in-law Andrew, and my neighbors James and John to pick up new nets. He taught them to fish for people, all kinds of people.

He gave them the love, the healing, the compassion and the words to give away to others: “The Kingdom of God is near.”

They gathered new people into the nets of God’s Kingdom, and called them to follow Jesus too, and many of them followed.

And it seems to me that those new nets have been handed from person to person through the years, as our Disruptive, Intrusive, Loving, Life-Changing Savior Jesus walks into new lives and new times and seasons. Hand to hand the nets are passed, as fishing for people continues.

There was something in Peter and the others that was listening when Jesus called them. There was something in the way Jesus called them that their hearts could hear.

The words are old words that once echoed across the waters of the Sea of Galilee, to my husband and my brother-in-law,

but they are new each time they are spoken,

because Jesus continues to speak them to each of us:

“The Kingdom of Heaven has come near, come follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Our Disruptive, Intrusive, Life-Changing, Jesus continues to invite.

Will you listen, will you grab the net and go fishing?

Boring Eugene and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009, “The fishermen are already at work, already have something useful and important to do, and are not looking for a new life. They do not seek him; he seeks and finds them (see John 4:23)The call of Jesus does not fill an obvious vacuum or meet an obvious need in their lives, but, like the call of prophets in the Old Testament, is intrusive and disruptive, calling them away from work and family.” (p. 24.2.9)

Green, Joel B, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby, Carolyn J. Sharp, eds, *Connections, A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 1 Advent through Epiphany*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019, p.

See also: Fishing in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,
<http://thewikibible.pbworks.com/w/page/22174694/Fishing%20in%20the%20Bible%20and%20the%20Ancient%20Near%20East>

Information about Capernaum:

<https://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/Capernaum.pdf>

<https://www.travelingisrael.com/capernaum/>