

WE ALL NEED FRIENDS

The gospel lesson today is the story of Jesus calling the disciples. I grew up in the Baptist church and we had a kid's song: "I will make you fishers of men, if you follow me." It was engrained in us; this whole story of Jesus beginning to call His followers. And you know each week I try to look at the gospel lesson and I say, "Okay, what am I curious about? What questions do I have?" I supposedly studied it, I should have some leg up on people but I usually don't so I have to study it and prepare and I'd like to share with you some of the questions that I have when I read the story and I'd like to share what I came up with and then we can discuss later, if you think it made any sense.

So what was I curious about today? First of all I'm curious, if you picture this, you've got these guys by the sea fishing and this travelling creature, not well known comes up and just says follow me, I'll make you fishers of people and they follow. So first of all, I thought that's a bit strange, I think they're strange for following a stranger, so what about that? That was my first question. My second question was the concept of fish and fishermen is really powerful throughout the Christian tradition but I don't know why. It was so powerful that the early Christians who were being persecuted would take in the sand and draw half of a circle and if you were a Christian you would quietly make the other half in the sign of a fish. The fish was the symbol of the early church and famously, in the biography of John McCain, he tells the story about being in a prisoner of war camp and one guard was particularly kind to him and one day the guard drew in the sand a fish and then quickly covered it over saying "you know, I'm a Christian." So the symbol of fish, I was curious about that, that was my second question and then my third question is: why did Jesus need disciples anyway? You believe Jesus is God coming into the world with all these powers, why

followers? Why call these people? Why did he need them? So those are the three I'm going to try to tackle today.

The first one was why did they follow him? It was a cold call, you know. Cold calls don't work but there is a line at the beginning of the story and as I looked into it, what we don't usually know is these disciples were followers of John the Baptist. They were on a spiritual path, they were looking and at this point in the story John the Baptist has been arrested by the authorities; he will soon be executed. So Jesus inherits John the Baptist's followers. So that's who these people are. That's why it was so fast. They were ready, they were looking. So that's pretty straightforward question number one. How about the fish? What's the importance of the fish? For this one I found kind of fascinating when I looked at what the mystics who look at the deeper meaning of scripture, what they came up with and I thought it was interesting. Fish, if you think about it, kind of dart around in the cold water, cold blooded, eyes wide open, that is symbolic of life here on earth, our daily life. If you think about it what do we do? We kind of dart around, we eat a little bit, we float over here, some days we're with a school, some days we're by our self. The meaning of it all isn't all that clear and the mystics believed that this description of the fish was our description on earth. A little not very clear, we're kind of darting around, we're just kind of doing our errands, we're going to the next meeting, trying to get the next gig, trying to make the new salary, trying get the new house, trying to get to the grocery store, we're just kind of darting around. And I know that when I was in my twenties and thirties, I was doing a lot of darting and what I find now that people get up into their older years begin to say "You know I did all that and I'm not sure it was all that meaningful, what was the purpose of it? Why was I doing it? Yes I got that and I got that status, or I got that gig, or I got that job, or I have this house or I have this car, I have this family or whatever I have but people are looking for meaning." And so in a way, being pulled out of that, being fished out of that

spiritually would be the symbolism of being fished out of it is being aware that there's something bigger. That's not it and so fishing people out of it. And we all know in our own lives, people who have either fished us out of situations or we've been around people who are just darting around and you can't get their attention or we've been at times where we needed to be fished out. We've been caught up in everything. Interesting image of the fish and it ties into the third question I had which was if Jesus is so powerful and God is so powerful, why would He need disciples? It may be one of the most radical teachings of Scripture that God is saying "God doesn't do it alone," that's pretty wild. That God needs us. We call them disciples but when you think about it these were Jesus' friends. These are the people late at night when He's having a drink and they're talking by the fire and sharing stories and we know that they were key women that were also friends, very controversial. These were the friends of Jesus. Jesus needed friends and there is a teaching in that, it can't be done alone. That becomes a more radical idea in a culture where we kind of made individualism everything: we can do it all. "I can do it on my app, I can watch it when I want, I can do it when I want. I don't need you, I don't need anyone. I can watch my shows when I want to watch them, when I want to watch them; in my time." A radical individualism, so much so that it is a kind of a radical concept that God is saying I need others to accomplish this; we can't be changing the world by ourselves, we've got to be in community and Jesus is demonstrating that right up front with His first act, calling together others who can be with Him. Jesus needed friends. We need friends and coming back to the fish, we need friends who are going to lift us out of our routines. We need friends who are going to challenge us to think beyond just the transactional culture which frankly permeates a lot of Washington, it's very transactional. "What can you do for me now and if you can't I'm looking over your shoulder because somebody else might be able to." That's not the friendship that I'm talking about. The friendship here is holding people up, letting them see "Hey, I think this is your purpose, I think this is what you do really well, you lift me up and thank you for doing it." That's the role of friends

and that's the role that Jesus needed with the disciples and it's the role that God is saying to us that this world, however it is, we are involved in procreating it. Wow, God needs us to be involved with it. It can get better, it can get worse and it depends on our activities, it depends on our friends, it depends on our love for each other.

So there is a lot in this short calling of the disciples. First, you've got to be ready, you've got to be paying attention. Are you even listening? A lot of people come to me and say, "I'd like to become spiritual but what does that look like? How do I do it?" And I always say, "Open up your heart, ask God's help but come in with no expectations. Stop putting pressure on yourself." Imagine if we could think of our relationship with God as more of a friendship where if you have a friend that you don't call frequently, it doesn't work. If you have a friend that you only call on when you're in trouble, it doesn't work. If you have a friend who you don't tell the truth to because you're afraid of being judged, it doesn't work. We have to have that intimate relationship with God that Jesus offers coming in human form to say that we have a friend in Jesus and a friend in God. Amen.