



Fishing for People

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (1/30/26)

Felt banners were the height of church decoration in the 1970s during my formative years in church. Epiphany Season always included two large green felt banners on either side of the chancel. The banner on the pulpit side featured real fishing nets and proclaimed in groovy felt lettering, “I will make you fishers of men!”

Of course, the banners did nothing to promote evangelism at my church. The evangelism learning curve of the Episcopal Church arcs toward effective Gospel sharing, but it is a long arc, my whole lifetime so far.

Ineffective banners are no surprise. The real struggle is misguided preaching about the passage in John where Jesus invites his disciples to come fish for people. Against all the sermons that strain to find a connection, there is no analogy between fishing for fish and fishing for people; there is no transferable skill set from fishing with nets to fishing with words embedded in trusting relationships.

In my reading, Jesus is being absurd on purpose to display the power of grace. He is calling utterly unskilled and unprepared people to the mission of evangelism to demonstrate that the power to spread the Gospel ultimately comes from Jesus alone. Only Jesus can make fishermen into bold, brave and humble evangelists who will shine with confidence and courage as they share their experience of Jesus in a risky world.

Only the transforming, converting power of the relationship Jesus initiates with us has the power to communicate the Gospel through us.

This is very Good News for all of us who feel sloppy and unprepared when it comes to giving an account of the faith that is in us. It is not our 'natural' resources that commend us to the task; it is what Jesus has done and what the Holy Spirit is doing that calls forth new gifts, or expanded gifts, for sincere sharing of what is most important to us: the liberating, loving, and life-giving Good News of Jesus the Messiah.

Where to begin? With someone you love and trust, practice sharing how Jesus has affected your life for the good. Ask your practice partner to be kind and gentle, to keep hilarity to a minimum, so to help you find your words. Have you experienced healing in body, mind or soul from God? Have you experienced new life, rebirth in ways big or small, as a gift from God? Have your joy and wonder in life been restored because of God? Were you lost in self-destruction and aimlessness until God became your way and your light? Had you been empty inside and longing for something only to discover that God was the object of your longing?

There are as many stories as there are pathways to God. With God and in a supportive community, we can all grow into competent communicators of what God has done in our lives which causes us to say, "Thanks be to God!"

We will be offering a short course on sharing your story of faith after Easter!