In the Gospel passage that we read earlier, we read a familiar story of Jesus recruiting his disciples. This is more than just recruiting someone for a job, but it was a life-transformation experience for the disciples involved, including all of their families. Having just been baptized by John, Jesus wasted no time to get down to business and officially launch his earthly ministry. But soon he realized that he cannot do it all by himself, he could not do it all by himself. He needed someone else alongside to help him. After all, this is not just His ministry, everyone is involved. As I mentioned last week, all of us are ministers of God and are called to be in ministry together, not just those who are ordained or designated with a title in front of his/her name.

 Many of the first disciples were just ordinary folks trying to make a living working in a profession that they only knew how. They were probably working in their family business for many generations. What did they know about spreading the gospel and reaching out to people for Christ? Probably not much! But Jesus saw something out of these fishermen that others did not. He saw them not just as fishermen, but as fishers of women and men. They knew much about casting out the nets and reeling in the fishes to the boat, but now instead of fishing for fish, they’re now fishing for people, that’s all!

When Jesus called upon Simon and Andrew, James and John, He called out to them one-by-one, ***Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.*** IMMEDIATELY, without hesitation whatsoever, those fishermen turned disciples dropped their nets, left their boats and followed Jesus. They didn’t even say their good-bye to their family. Talk about commitment and dedication….how many of us could do the same thing, if we were being asked today?

Jesus was asking these fishermen to make a **dramatic life-changing decision** - a **total commitment** in honoring their true calling from God.....right there on the spot. They didnt weigh in on all of their options or to prioritize their other life matters. Well....I got an elderly mother to take care of. I’ve got kids who are about to go to college in a couple of years. I still have years of mortgage that need to be paid off. I’m a couple of years away from retirement. Ask me again in a couple of years, Jesus....maybe then Ill be ready. How many times have we brush God off like that?

Many of these disciples were professional fishermen, Im sure they knew all there is to know about fishing. They didnt need a carpenter to tell them what needs to be done when it comes to fishing. But Jesus wanted to nurture and develop them as disciples (not just followers of Jesus…there is a difference).

Furthermore, often times we get caught up with the practice of “how” we do ministry, but neglected to pause to reflect on the “why” part? **Why do we do what we do?** This is part of what Christian discipleship is about! It’s a matter of one’s spiritual discipline and purpose.

**When we cast our nets out for Christ, we place our faith in God, on the other end of the line.** Sometimes that is all we could do as we wait faithfully and prayerfully for the other end to respond. Someday we may catch nothing and go home empty-handed, and someday we will reel in the “Catch of the Day”.

**Through our discipline of faith, Christ invites us to exercise our imagination, to dream new dreams and to cast new visions and hopes for our future.**  It means that **at times we are being challenged to take some bold risks of faith in trying out new things that we’ve never done before.** This is all part of our faith journey as we are being transformed from being “fishermen” into “fishers of men”!

This is NOT a time for us to map out our “exit strategy” or our survival plan, as some churches are doing. I don’t think that’s not what God had envisioned us to do either. But instead, Christ invites us into a period of **repentance, missional discernment** and **re-imagination,** in faithful obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit.It means that we must **pause** what we have been doing, **examine** our past, **seek God for grace, mercy and forgiveness, as we rededicate our trust and turn our faith back to God.** Sound simple, doesn’t it? But it is an on-going work-in-progress.

In the Old Testament reading that we read earlier, we read about another recruited servant of God – Jonah. **God called Jonah to embark on a special mission to a place where Jonah did not want to go, to bring a message of judgment upon a people who did not want to hear.** Jonah feared for his own life, because the people Nineveh (which is in the modern day Iraq) were evil. They might chase him out of town or even stone him, especially if his message was not what they would like to hear. Many other prophets were shunned and rejected by their own people (well, the most obvious of all, of course – Jesus)

Jonah did not respond like the first disciples who dropped whatever they were doing and went. But instead, Jonah went in the opposite direction of where God wanted him to go. He denied his own calling from God. **Jonah might be able to run from Nineveh but he could not hide from God**…at least not in the eyes of the almighty omnipresent and omniscience God.

I suppose the city of Nineveh was like the city of “Gothem” or Sodom and Gomorrah. The people had sinned and disobeyed against God and lived in the wicked ways. In spite of all of that, God had not given up upon the people of Nineveh. God was willing to give the people a “second chance”, including Jonah himself. It was never too late to repent and turn back to God.

By the grace of God, the people of Nineveh listened to what Jonah had to say as they fast and prayed. They put on sackcloth to repent for 40 days, as sign of their repentance.

The story of Jonah was not just about a giant fish swallowing up a rebellious prophet who refused to go where God wanted him to go. It was a story of God’s redemptive power and grace that were offered upon God’s people, even though at times we might feel we were swallowed up in the “Belly of a Giant Fish”.

God’s story of redemption is about being spit out of the “Belly of a Giant Fish”, and pursuing the calling that we have been commissioned to. It’s about “casting out the net of salvation” and rescue as many men and women who needed to hear of God’s grace through the power of God’s redemption and forgiveness.

Even God gave the people in Nineveh a second chance, imagine what God was willing to do for those who call upon God’s name and repent. **Are we willing to repent and seek God for forgiveness and a new beginning?**

**Time after time after time, God still proves that He active and merciful in this world. Despite all the critics out there, God remains faithful to the church, and remains active in this community and in our lives today, however sinful and hopeless at time it may seem.**

Each morning, God invites us to pause and embrace what God is doing and as we sing a new song like what we sang in our opening hymn earlier. We come to appreciate God’s new creation in and around us – the beauty that we often take for granted or failed to notice in our lives. God continues to hear us, continues to replenish us and to heal us, even though we did not deserve such grace, like the people in Nineveh.

As the prophet Isaiah reassured us, *"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*Even the grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever.[[2]](#footnote-2)* God remains faithfully engaged in the transforming and reconciling work even amongst the most wicked people like those in Nineveh, as long as they turn from their sinful way and return to God. **God may be sending us out like Jonah into the least welcoming places to bring those who are wicked back into God’s embrace.** We might turn the other way, denied our calling, like Jonah did. But time after time after time, God demonstrates his compassion and mercy upon God’s own people and is willing to give those who repent a “second chance.” God has called us to be His agent of grace and compassion to be extended upon the people. How are we responding to God’s calling in our lives today as we hear God summons us, ***“Follow me, and I will make you fishers for people.***[[3]](#footnote-3)

As the great Reformed theologian, John Calvin once wrote, ***God called rough mechanics like Simon, Andrew, James and John in order to show that none of them are called by virtue of his or her own talents and excellences.[[4]](#footnote-4)***

God is not interested in what we can do with our abilities, but rather **what we are willing and able to give for the Kingdom of God. As long as we are willing to courageously cast the net and faithfully hold the line, God will reel in the fish for us.** When God calls and sends us, there’s no place where we can hide. We must march on and obediently go where God is sending us. At times, we might find ourselves in the belly of a beast, when we feel that we’ve been consumed.

It is my prayer that we shall continue to honor our individual and communal callings to be God’s faithful and obedient disciples. Continue to share our gifts and our talents in creative and imaginative ways, while seeking renewal and transformation of our hearts for the glory of God.

Friends, we have some unfinished ***“Fishy Business*** to take care of. We need to put up a sign that says “***Gone Fishing***”. So let us go and follow the Spirits leading with great Faith, Hope, and Love. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Isaiah 43:18-19*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 40:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Mark 1:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *John Calvin, Community on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, vol. 1. trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), 242-44.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)