

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

January 25, 2026

Matthew 4:12-23

An Ordinary Day by the Sea

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA*



It was just an ordinary day for four fishermen whose lives... by the end of the day... would totally change course after meeting Jesus. There is much to pondered about the power of following Jesus into an unknown future, even in these times that are not ordinary in any sense of the word.

But before we journey to the Sea of Galilee, I find myself, once again, needing to address this moment in our nation and to name the grief and the outrage that is being felt. Wanton murders sanctioned by a wayward government are seeking to wound the soul of this nation. The violent, senseless death of Intensive Care nurse Alex Pretti adds to the mounting list of atrocities that are being committed both out in the open and in secret... in secure detention centers where children are being traumatized and where the body count continues to rise. One hundred faith leaders were arrested in Minneapolis this past week. The chaos and the pain is affecting everyone. The amplification of that chaos is but another weapon that is being used in an attempt to silence the voices of fellow Americans... and to instill fear... in hopes of bending the people of this nation into submission.

Jesus was born into a world of great injustice and imperial oppression. Jesus' simple act of calling ordinary fishermen to follow him was no small thing. Those of us gathered here together today may not be sure about how we are being called to do are part in helping to heal this nation, but we can start where we are by acknowledging this moment and by seeking guidance, strength, and healing... that we may continue our baptismal work of co-creating with God... in the project of ushering in a new reign of peace and well-being for all. We are being called... and we have gathered together here today... to be fed in Word and Sacrament... and to reset our compasses on Christ. I say all of this with the realization that we are all working hard to stay centered... and that we need to do what is necessary to take care of our mental health and spiritual well-being. Our faithful responses in these times will vary. What will not change is God's ever-present... ever-lasting call to remember that Jesus came to show us a better way... and that Jesus continues to call us to follow his way of love and life. Let us now return to the shores of the Sea of Galilee to witness the birth of the movement to which we all belong as followers of Jesus.



It was an ordinary day on the Sea of Galilee, far from the bustle of the city and centers of wealth. The fishermen worked mending and tending their nets so that they could cast them into fresh waters over and over again... in order to meet the state regulated quotas required of the fishing industry. Fishermen were at the bottom of an economic hierarchy. Caesar, Herod and the tax

collectors sat comfortably on the top. In addition to basic taxes on daily hauls of fish, taxes were levied on fish processing, and on transportation of the product. The day started out just like any other day... but by day's end, a movement had begun as four fishermen drop their nets to follow a man named Jesus.

What would have caused the fishermen to utterly and completely change their lives? Could it have been that the men were merely tired of the daily grind of making a living and paying their taxes? Could it be that they were ready for a change? Or could it be that their encounter with Jesus was so impressive, so utterly significant and life-changing, that the fishermen left behind their livelihoods, their families, their community and just about everything they had ever known having grown up in a small, relatively insignificant place known as Capernaum by the Sea? Jesus said, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you."¹ Jesus did not ask the fishermen to abandon who they were. Jesus was inviting Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, to bring their whole selves... their experience, their gifts, their imperfections, too... to a new movement. No details were provided. Jesus simply extended an invitation using images and language that the men understood.

If you are like me, you may have wrestled with the idea of "fishing for people." As a child, I loved the song we learned in Sunday School, "I will make you fishers of men if you follow me..." But on further consideration, that invitation could be viewed as "hooking" souls... of seeking to reel in those who need to be saved... the focus being on the work of moving people from the "unsaved" column to the "saved" column in God's great ledger book. That view of saving souls is not the version of Christianity that I know, or that our Episcopal tradition supports. The imagery of fishing for people might remind us of the dreaded "E" word: "Evangelism." ...a word that can easily elicit a cringe response because the word is often associated with annoying, unwelcome proselytizing. However, the "E" word actually comes from the Greek word meaning "Good News"... and if the news really is good, if the news is meaningful and important for the person receiving it, how could it be cringeworthy? In our baptismal vows, we are asked, "Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?" to which we answer: "I will, with God's help." We are called to reflect God's love in the world, using the gifts and experience we bring to the project of discipleship and of sharing God's vision for the world. The work of discipleship will be expressed differently and uniquely by followers of Jesus. Debie Thomas reminds us that:

To the engineer, maybe Jesus says, "Follow me and build my people." To the visual artist, "Follow me and paint the colors of the kingdom." To the stay-at-home parent, "Follow me and nurture my children." To the dancer: "Follow me and dance the Spirit." To the physician, "Follow me and heal broken souls." To all of us: "Follow me and I will make you..." This is a promise to cultivate us, not to sever us from what we love. It's a promise rooted in gentleness and respect — not violence and coercion. It's a promise that when we dare to let go, the things we relinquish might be returned to us anew, enlivened in ways we couldn't have imagined on our own.²

Some of you may remember our previous Presiding Bishop Curry's reminder that we, as followers of Jesus, are the Episcopal branch of the ongoing Jesus Movement³... a movement that

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Matthew 4:12-24.

² Debie Thomas, "Fishing for People," *Journey with Jesus*, January 14, 2018.

³ Episcopal Church's "What is the Jesus Movement?" <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/jesus-movement/>

began on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. As a people who have committed our lives to Christ through baptism, we are part of a movement of people “who center their lives on Jesus and follow him into loving, liberating and life-giving relationships with God, each other and creation.” The call is to “restore each other and all creation to unity with God in Christ.” As followers of Jesus, we are called to offer the whole of ourselves to God’s way of LIFE spelled large. We do this through prayer, worship, teaching, preaching, gathering, healing, action, family, work, play and rest.

Being a follower of Jesus means doing what love requires... doing what love asks of us as we seek to be faithful to our vows to love others as Jesus loves us. Being a follower of Jesus means striving for justice and peace among all peoples. In this time of turmoil and fear, as we seek to keep our bearings and figure out our part in bringing healing to the nation and the world, we, as a people of faith, are being called to renew our commitment to follow Jesus... and like the experience of the first disciples, we do not know what the journey will entail or what the journey with Jesus will ask of us. We are, however, called to follow Jesus wherever he leads. We do know how the story will ultimately end. The God of life will have the last word. It is the vision of God’s reign on earth that draws us to participate in the project of healing the brokenness in our midst. Our call to discipleship in this moment means witnessing to Jesus’ way of love and justice... and of boldly using our gifts, our words and our actions in ways that make a difference... faithful action in the world that may well require courage. As the martyr theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us... commitment to following Jesus is not meant to be easy. There is a cost to discipleship.

When Jesus was calling the first disciples, he did not provide a book of protocols or step-by-step instructions. Jesus invited the disciples to join him... just as they were... as works-in-progress. The men wouldn’t have known that they would witness miraculous acts of feeding and healing. Jesus did not tell the neophyte disciples that they would at times look foolish... and he did not explicitly tell them that he was equipping them to carry on the work of discipleship after he was gone. At the beginning of their journey with Jesus, the fishermen would not have known that... in time... they would be struck with piercing grief... or that... come Easter Sunday... after Good Friday’s cosmic quake... their lives would change once again as ALL would be made new. As the fishermen laid down their nets to follow Jesus, they could not possibly have known of the challenges ahead... nor could they have known of the grand new vistas and opportunities that would be opening up for them. The story of Jesus calling the first disciples... offers a message of strength and courage to we who are seeking to forge a new and faithful path in frightening and perilous times.

Like our friends, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John... we are called to deepen our relationship with Jesus and with one another, that we may know... in our deepest selves... the transformative power of God’s love... a love that promises to guide and strengthen us for our work in the world...

...especially when that work is challenging and the cost is high.

Amen...