

Sermon January 21, 2018 Caught in the Net Cara B. Hochhalter

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20

I had a chance to walk along a couple different shorelines while visiting my sister last week in Seattle. We drove up to Edmunds on the Puget Sound and walked along the pebbly beach there. The sun began to peek through the clouds in this later afternoon and lit up patches of snow on distant mountains and two large ferries in the distance.

Another day I walked along Lake Washington where Mt. Rainier was "out." You can't always see this volcanic mountain, Mt. Rainier, because of all the rainy days in Seattle's winter, but this day, she was out....and she looked huge. Unbelievable really, she towered over the other mountains while her snow-covered flanks shone in the sun. A ring of fog skirted below her so this incredible mountain looked like it was suspended in the air.

I was so excited and took a couple of pictures...and then was disappointed that you could hardly see the mountain at all in my little cell phone! My brother-in-law told me the size of the mountain is an illusion because it is on the horizon...much like the moon that looks so much larger when it is low in the sky! Why my little phone camera would not also capture the illusion, I don't know.... maybe one of you could explain that to me!

So, you might wonder how I will link this experience with our scriptures this morning? Perhaps, Jesus saw something in the fishermen that they had not even seen in themselves. Jesus saw in these new disciples, the bigger than life possibilities of lives lived within the infinite love of God.

Let us be in prayer: God who sees us larger than we feel, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today's stories are about being called...for Jonah, he was called to go to the city of Ninevah and warn the people there that if they did not change their ways, calamity would come to them. They heard and they repented; they changed their ways....and God forgave them....even as Jonah got a little pouty that they did not get what he thought they deserved.

In Mark, we have the wonderful telling of Jesus calling out to fishermen to join him. How beautiful...the story does not say that Jesus went to those who were academically

gifted nor held high positions in the synagogue nor to those who were exceedingly wealthy. He went to the lakeshore, to reach out to down to earth, hardworking people who fished for their living.

This story in the book of Mark makes it all sound very urgent. The writer of Mark often uses the word "immediately". We have to understand that in those times there was fear that the end...was very near. William Abraham writes, "Jesus sweeps through Galilee and takes it by storm...the underlying sense is that God is on the march in the ministry of Jesus" and *the time is now*. Mark has Jesus saying, "the time is fulfilled." The time is up! We cannot and we must not delay the living out of the principles of love, forgiveness, compassion and justice....the time is up!

Many of us hear these words today! The time is up for racism to end, the time is up for the abuse of women and children, the time is up for senseless wars, the time is up for doing harm to this precious place we call earth. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled...now is the time." And now we have thousands of people across our world, saying it again....the time is up.

Kathryn Matthews writes that Jesus was not talking about the kind of time we keep track of on clocks and calendars, but a different kind of time. You know the difference between "chronological" time and "kairos" time... Kairos time in the Greek meant an *opportune* time...the time was ripe, ready, it was the fullness of time...and there was the expectation that something would happen. Mark seemed to say that there was a great necessity for what Jesus was teaching and they needed to act fast! Perhaps we are at that place now.

When Jesus walked along this shoreline, calling disciples, everything around them contradicted the vision of justice and peace, of shalom that was at the heart of God's promises. Like now, perhaps...when we think of the widening gap in poverty, racial injustice, environmental degradation and the hard language dished out describing immigrants who work in our land....don't you want to cry out...the time is up? How Jesus needs disciples in our own times...how do you and I hear that call?

Those fishermen in Galilee dropped everything to follow Jesus. Well, perhaps it is more about how we also can turn in an instant. We may not drop our jobs or the responsibilities that we have in our daily lives...but we also can turn...in an instant to a way of loving through faith...informed by these very faith stories that we hear each week. We can turn our attitudes away from so much materialism to realize that the real joy comes through gifts of love and compassion and fairness for all.

I love the image of this fishing net. Perhaps Jesus tossed out a net for us to get "caught up in". It is one of such incredible love but also challenge... Hear again the prayer of invocation that is in your bulletin by Thomas Kelly. How beautiful to hear the words from this Quaker educator as we consider them along with the story of fishermen, and us, being called:

Infinite God, it is an overwhelming experience to fall into your hands...[net]...to be invaded to the depths of one's being by Your presence. To be, without warning, wholly uprooted from all earth-born securities and blown by a tempest of unbelievable power which leaves one's old proud self utterly defenseless...

Is this how those early disciples felt? Imagine being swept up....by this Christ, by God who calls us...and finds us.

I have been reading the new book, *Barking to the Choir*, by the Jesuit priest, Greg Boyle. You may remember that Father Boyle works with gang members in the Los Angeles area. I highly recommend this and his first book, *Tattoos on the Heart*.

Here's a story. Father Boyle describes a gang member who tells him that he has been having "one-on-ones with---you know---God." The young man goes on to say that he is amazed that even after all the bad he has done, "the Dude shows up!" The Dude [meaning God] shows up!

The poet Hafiz said, "Ever since Happiness heard your name, it's been running down the street trying to find you." Boyle says: "No one escapes the notice of God. So we try to find the joy there is in God's finding us..." And a I love this line, he writes "We pull up our antennae to its furthest peak and place ourselves on the lookout for glimpses of joy at its most unleashed---and the tenderness of God---finds us."

These fisherman let God find them...and they were swept up in a net of inclusive, holy love...it became a Way of life...even if they didn't get it a lot of the time...and we also don't get it a lot of the time....but it is a Way whose time is now.

And how do we live out from this inclusive love...staying home and watching old movies? (I am preaching to myself, here.) I know some of you went to the Women's March. On Wednesday, I attended the meeting in Northampton about the Poor People's Campaign that describes itself as a "spiritual and moral movement." It is a movement that has started in churches and is spreading across the country. It is a movement to say the time is up. It is a call to be in solidarity with those who are hurting...people of color who still experience hateful racism, anyone who is abused, for those who are victims of poverty, and even for the saving of our ecological earth.

We are all in this together. The Poor People's Campaign is planning a 6-week period of non-violent marches and actions from the day after Mother's Day to the end of June. John Hoffman also went to this meeting and is willing to meet with others of our congregation who are interested in expressing your faith...through this movement.

Our daughter went to Central Park in New York yesterday for the Women's March...well, she tried to march but there were more than 200,000 people there and she said it took an hour and a half to walk one block....but she loved being a part of it. I told her about the Poor People's Campaign...and she said, "Well, Mom, what are you going to do?".....

To look for that answer, I think I will turn to these words and prayer by Thomas Kelly who wrote:

Deep within us...is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of [humanity]. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it....It is the Presence in our midst. Here is the Slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action.

Let us get caught in this net of extravagant love and light...a light so bright that the shadows of this world are seen but not feared... a love so deep that we can see the possibilities for hope. The time is up for us to be disciples for God's peace.

Amen.