

BACKGROUND: 12 June 2016

(Reading: Mark 1: 14-20)

Mark is the oldest Gospel in the New Testament and most biblical scholars agree that the other Gospels use Mark as a source.

Mark starts his gospel without a genealogy. He starts by telling his readers about John the Baptist and the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Then in the same fast pace, he tells us of Jesus calling his first disciples, Simon, his brother Andrew, James and his brother John next to the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus spent the greater portion of His life and ministry in Galilee. Galilee was the name of a region of northern Palestine, bounded on the north by Syria, on the west by Sidon, Tyre, Ptolemais and their territories and the raised mass of land of Carmel, on the south by Samaria and on the east by the Jordan. It was divided into Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee.

Many of the teachings and miracles of our Lord took place in Galilee including the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), the raising of the widow's son (Luke 7:11–15), the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:44), and many others.

Now Jesus was walking next to the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is thirteen miles long and a little less than seven miles wide in the widest part. Its greatest depth is less than 200 feet. On the east side, the mountain rises from its shore to an elevation of 2,000 feet. On the south, the lake touches the plain of the Jordan valley. The River Jordan enters the lake at the northern end, and exits at the southern end.

The fish of this lake have always been held in highest appreciation. Bethsaida on the north was known as a "house of fish" indicating the abundance of fish found in the lake. Tarichea on the south was a fish factory. There were plenty of boats engaged in fishing or traffic with a lucrative shipbuilding business in the area.

The trade in fish was highly developed in biblical times. One of the gates in Jerusalem was called the Fish Gate (Neh 3:3; Zep 1:10). The law in Leviticus 11:10–12 permitted the Jews to eat fish, but only those having both fins and scales. Such scaleless fish as catfish were forbidden even though they had fins.

Egyptian paintings depict various methods of fishing, and the Philistines fished in the Mediterranean Sea. Since the people of Israel were not a seafaring nation, it is safe to assume that most of their fish came from fresh water lakes and rivers, especially the Sea of Galilee. Some 36 species of fish have been identified in that lake, including varieties of perch, carp, barbel, sardine and catfish.

The method of fishing characteristic of NT times was the dragnet. After a boat had put out into the deep (Lk 5:4) a large net would be thrown out from it and then dragged toward shore by the rowers in the boat, possibly with the help of a crew in another boat. The catch was sorted out on shore (Mt 13:47, 48). Fishing was usually carried out at night when the coolness of the water brought fish closer to the surface and when they could not see the approaching nets.

The Jews also fished by hook and line (Mt 17:27), a few by spear (Jb 41:7), and some by the throw net (Ez 47:10). Habakkuk refers to hook and line fishing, netting, and dragnet (1:15).

Fish were prepared as food in a number of ways: boiling, steaming, frying, pickling, smoking, or salting. Salt curing was probably the most common method of preserving fish that were to be transported any distance or kept for any length of time. It may have been the kind of fish that fed the 5,000 (Lk 9:10–17).

Jesus called 4 fishermen to leave their only income behind....but not only their income, their families... and to follow him. It was not a small ask...no, Jesus expected everything from them. Jesus said they will become different fishers – not catching fish any longer but people.

They trusted Jesus, left everything behind and followed Him.

Amen

SERMON

The text verses for the sermon are verse 17: “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” and verse 18: At once they left their nets and followed him.

The meaning of Jesus’ call to us is straightforward.

You and I need to attract people with the way we go about showing God's inclusive love to all people. You and I should show to other people that we have the living hope that there is a new life awaiting us in heaven, made possible by the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

But this task is not that simple. Whenever we go about, doing our daily business, we need to know the people around us just like the fishermen who know where the fish are and what they are likely to catch.

We need to blend in and make a difference not by bashing Bibles about or making people feel guilty but just like we did yesterday, opening the Church doors – making everyone see the Church in the community, handing out balloons, serving coffee and tea, selling the best home baking from the tea tent.

You and I are called by God to go out and bring the people into the fold of God's love. We are not here to convert people and make them attend Church. No, we are simply here to tell them that if they want to hear God speaking to them, they can attend a worship service. We are called to make people aware of the inclusive love of God. And I know you cannot make a horse drink, but surely, like Lincoln once said: you can make the horse so thirsty that he/she will not refuse to drink!

So let us all do this in our own way, resembling the love and mercy of Jesus Christ because the gospel message has the power to change lives, shine light into darkness, and deliver people from the destruction of sin, hell and death. There is power in no other message and no other "bait" can catch the fish of God.

Today we are witnesses of God's calling three Elders, people that He chose to help his flock in their hour of need, three people to help the chosen servant of God, the Minister, to bring the Gospel to all people.

Amen