

“Called to be Witnesses for Christ”

A sermon by Reverend Alice Marcrum
3rd Sunday after Epiphany, 2006

This past week on my way home from work, I stopped off at the carwash. I had been listening to a rousing rendition of old hymns sung by choirs. As I pulled my car up to get out, I started to turn off the music, but changed my mind and just let it play. I didn't think anything more about it until my car was brought around to be hand dried by some young men.

I watched as the young men laughed and mimicked being choir directors. Now at this point I could have seen these actions as insulting, but instead I found it to be rather amusing. It was amusing for me, because in spite of their mocking, they were hearing God being praised. So I sat and marveled at the Holy Spirit's work upon them. These were grown young men acting like boys at play.

Then one of them motioned for the owner to come and claim my car. Now I had been waiting in the back of the waiting area and apparently had not been seen by any of the young men. As I walked up to get my car, a quiet embarrassment fell upon them. Some turned their heads and walked away, but the one who motioned for me just kept looking at me as I came closer to show him my receipt.

Since I was on my way home from work, I was still wearing my clergy collar, which is a dead give away of what type of work I do. Wanting to alleviate the tension of embarrassment the young men were portraying, I smiled brightly and said to the young man still standing in apparent shock by my car, “So did you guys have fun praising the Lord?”

At that the young man standing in front of my car, hung his head and very quietly replied, “Yes, ma'am.”

Still smiling brightly, I said, “That's great!” and got into my car and drove away as my CD player continued to play songs of praise.

I do not know what happened next to these young men, but I had seen a definite conviction of heart by the Holy Spirit in them. Hopefully, they will in the future be playful in the Lord, not in a mocking way, but with a joy filled heart. I can only pray that my small act of sharing God's praises with them will draw them closer to Him, because the Holy Spirit was allowed to touch their hearts. This is what it means to be a witness for Christ. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to use us to share Christ with others. The simple act of leaving a religious CD playing can be used by the Lord to draw others to Him.

In today's gospel reading from Mark, Jesus is walking along the Sea of Galilee, which is a large body of water in Galilee. From north to south the Sea of Galilee is approximately

12 and a half miles long and from east to west at its widest it is about 7 and a half miles wide. The Jordan River, the same river in which Jesus was baptized, flows into the Sea of Galilee.

During Jesus' time, fishing was a major industry for Israel. So when Jesus calls out to Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing business and become "*fishers of men*"; it is not as though they were selected out of a few fisherman Jesus just happened to see. There were probably lots of boats with many fishermen busily working to bring in the catch for the day.

At the time when Jesus called to them, Peter and Andrew were "*casting a net into the sea*". According to Mendel Nun in his book *The Sea of Galilee and its Fishermen in the New Testament*, the cast nets that they were using were circular with bars of lead attached to the edge. A single fisherman's cast net was from six to eight meters in diameter. The net was tucked up under the fisherman's right arm then thrown into the water. Since it took both Peter and Andrew to cast their net into the sea, they were probably using a larger net with heavier sinkers. The larger nets were used to catch big fish.

This insight lets us know that Peter and Andrew were probably not poor fishermen like most of us have been taught. Since they were using a big net, they were most likely owners of a prosperous fishing business. So when they leave their fishing nets behind to follow Jesus, it is not because they think he has a more lucrative business offer for them. In fact, we know that Peter had a house in Capernaum large enough to house not only his wife and family, but also his mother-in-law. Apparently, there was something about Jesus that was powerful and dynamic enough to pull Peter and Andrew away from all they owned and loved.

The same thing happens to James and John. Jesus calls them to him while James and John were "*in their boat mending the nets*". So they too had a prosperous business to own more than one casting net. Yet, all four men immediately stopped what they were doing and left everything - family, friends, houses, boats, all that they had - and followed Jesus. For them, following Jesus was more important than anything this world had to offer them.

What was it in Jesus' offer that so attracted them? It was really a rather strange offer that he gave them. He offered to turn them into fishers of people. Today when we read this passage, we probably don't even consider how strange this must have sounded to these hardworking fishermen. How does one fish for people? And more importantly, why would anyone want to fish for people, especially if you had left behind all that you owned and could no longer employ them or have the means to feed and care for them. Yet, they dropped their nets and followed Him.

I wonder how many of us here today would drop all that we have and leave it behind to follow Jesus. If He called us to follow Him to Africa, would we go? How about across the street to our neighbors and share the good news? What about just leaving praise

music on in our vehicles to share with others? Would we be too embarrassed to risk being made vulnerable for Christ?

Today we have the good news of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension to share. The only thing that the disciples knew was a man walking along the shore who promised to change them and that was enough. There was just something different, something special about this man who chose them from the others without even an introduction and they left all and followed Him.

Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "***Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.***" Not all of us are called to leave all of our worldly goods behind like the first apostles and the missionaries who have risked their lives and some who have even been martyred for Christ. Not all of us are called to be apostles or leaders in the church, but we are all called to be witnesses for Christ. Being a witness for Christ means taking risks that we will be mocked and scorned for our beliefs; but with these risks come opportunities to share the wonder of the Christ who saw something special in four ordinary fishermen just trying to make a living in this world.

All we have to do is be willing vessels for the Holy Spirit. If we just let go of our own stuff that keeps us from witnessing for Jesus, such as our pride, then the Spirit can use us. Even the simple ordinary act of going to the car wash can become a life changing moment for someone if we just share the joy of our Lord with others.