

SERMON: What's Your Ministry?

TEXT: Matthew 4:12-23

I remember one of my friends telling me years ago that he was taking things apart and putting them back together again before he could walk. I have other friends who tell the story of the time their child was playing in another room of the house. When they came to check on him, they discovered he had taken all the hinges off one of the doors! We've all heard other stories about successful musicians who had a love for singing before they could talk or who played the piano before their feet could reach the pedals. It just seems like their gifts and their life's work was so clearly laid out for them even before people thought to pose the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

I imagine, however, that their path wasn't necessarily as easy as I make it sound. Perhaps they did question, as many of us do, what career to pursue. Perhaps they strayed from the path or rebelled against the assumptions of everyone around them.

Long ago, before people had so many choices and opportunities, the choice was often made for them. If a man owned a butcher shop, his son was expected to

also become a butcher so he could take over the shop when his father retired. Of course, all the way back to the time of Jesus, fathers and sons were fishing together.

From the Gospel of Matthew we read, “As [Jesus] walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”

If you grew up in the church, this story is probably very familiar to you. We all know that invitation from Jesus (but in less inclusive language), “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Does anyone remember the song? “I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men....” When I was leading

the Cherub Choir full of preschoolers at my home church, I had to think very carefully about the action of casting your line and then reeling it in, because I am *not* a fisherman!

But let's look at this story from a different angle. Think for a moment about the last sentence of the passage: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." If Jesus had told the fishermen at the start that this was what he would be doing, imagine how they would have reacted.

"Ok, hang on, Jesus. Teaching in the synagogue? Curing diseases? These things are way beyond our skill set! We're fishermen. We don't know how to read. We don't have many social skills. We wouldn't be any help to you at all in the kind of work you're talking about. You'd better ask someone else to follow you."

But Jesus knew they *did* have what he was looking for. And he knew that he had to appeal to them in terms they could understand. Yes, they would be doing

something new, but it would involve skills that they already had. “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

No matter how many times you may have heard it before, it never hurts to be reminded that we *all* have skills and abilities that can be used for God’s good purposes. We all have ways of proclaiming and teaching the good news. We all have abilities that can be used for healing people, because healing comes in many different forms. We all have a *ministry*.

Sometimes our ministry changes over time. Sometimes by necessity, and sometimes by choice. You may get bored with doing the same things year after year, and you want to try something new. You may move to a new location or enter a new phase in life. You may discover or develop a new skill or talent that you didn’t know you had. You may become limited in your physical or mental abilities as you age.

I remember a man in my home church who was a successful banker. But one day, he decided he wanted to be a pig farmer. He bought a farm outside the city, and moved his family there to begin a new and very different life.

I knew a woman in Springfield who taught elementary school. So, naturally, everybody in the church thought she would be the perfect Sunday School teacher. But she always said 'no' whenever she was asked. She made it clear that because she was with children all week, she needed a break from them on the weekend. But she did sit on the Christian Education Committee, and was a great help in choosing curriculum and planning special events.

A man I knew taught business and German courses at a local college. One year I asked him to play the part of Jesus in a Lenten drama. He agreed, but then he joked about it for weeks while we prepared, suggesting outrageous ways in which he wanted to edit the script. He acted like he thought it was silly. But after that worship service where he played the part, people in the congregation said they didn't even realize it was him, he played it so powerfully.

Another woman had always been active in the church, but in her nineties she became mostly homebound. She still wanted to serve, so we asked her to be on the prayer chain and to send cards to people.

Though all these examples are church-related, your ministry might be needed somewhere outside the church. Some of you read to children, work at the FISH food pantry, volunteer at the hospital, or care for your grandchildren while their parents are at work. Yes, that's a ministry, too.

Every year at annual meeting time, I read through the reports and I think about all the people who were involved in doing ministry and making things happen. If you have brought a dish for a potluck meal or worked in the kitchen doing dishes, that is ministry. If you have voted in a meeting or attended a special event, that is ministry. If you have changed light bulbs or fixed a broken toilet or taken out the trash, that is ministry. If you put one dollar in the offering plate every week, that is ministry. If you go fishing and donate your catch so the church can have a fish fry, that is ministry. If you have given in any way of your time, talent, and treasure, that is ministry.

It's true what many church bulletins show, when they list the church staff; next to the word *ministers*, it says, *all church members*. And sometimes you'll see a church sign where the letter U is missing. It may be trite, but it's true, "It's not church without U!"

Simon and Andrew, James and John were fishermen. That was all they knew, the only thing they were good at. But when Jesus invited them to follow, saying he would make them fish for people, he made them ministers.

Jesus invites us, too, and each of us has a ministry. Let's do it, to the glory of God!

AMEN.