

In the first scripture we read, we heard an invitation from Jesus given to 4 men. Only four men. Four fishermen. Four fishermen who were given an invitation to leave their boats, leave their livelihoods, leave their families, and come and follow Jesus. We heard an invitation that Jesus was inviting them to change from fishing for fish to fishing for people.

Our second reading is also an invitation given by God. A similar invitation as to the one given to the four fishermen. This is an invitation given to a scared young man by the name of Jonah.

In this invitation, Jonah is invited by God to go to the city of Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrians who were the enemies of Jonah's people. Jonah has no desire to go to Nineveh. Jonah sets out to go in the opposite direction and boards a boat for the city of Tarshish.

But as many of us know, Jonah never makes it to Tarshish. A great wind comes upon the sea and the sailors on the boat with Jonah become afraid. The sailors decide that the only solution is for Jonah to be thrown overboard.

But then God sends a big fish to swallow up Jonah and give him time to reconsider his decisions. After being saved by God through the belly of the fish, Jonah is given new instructions.

Read Jonah 3

We just read the shortest but most effective sermon in the Bible. "Forty days more and the people of Nineveh will be overthrown." That's the entire sermon. The people hear the sermon, repent, and change their ways.

But, of course, Jonah is not happy. He wanted the Ninevites to be defeated. Jonah wanted Nineveh to be destroyed. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh because he feared that God would keep his word and save Nineveh. And much to Jonah's displeasure, God saves Nineveh.

Jesus comes upon four fishermen and invites them to leave their livelihood, to leave their community, to leave their families, and come and follow him. To come and follow him and to come and fish for people.

We have usually read this passage of Scripture as an individual summons. We have usually read it to mean that Jesus invites us to a personal relationship and to invite others into a personal relationship with Jesus. Fishing for men or fishing for people has been read by many of us fearfully to mean an invitation to speak individually to others about their own relationship with God.

But I want to invite us to read this passage of Scripture today as an invitation to be a part of a community of people that are called out to make a positive impact in our community and in our families. To be a shining light of Christ to those around us. To be a part of a church community that seeks to be a glimmer of light for the community around us.

I invite us to see this passage as an invitation to be a part of Christ's church. What does it mean to follow and come and fish for people? It means an invitation to share your gifts and your abilities and be a part of a church community that is seeking to make an impact in the community and in families around us.

We who are gathered in this sanctuary and we who feel connected to this community of faith are not an isolated collection of individuals. We are a body of various members with various gifts. And each one of us brings something unique and special to this body.

We have people here who are expert craftsmen. We have people here who are excellent teachers. We have people here with a passion to care for others. We have people here who have arts and crafts skills. We have young and we have old. We are many shades with many opinions and beliefs.

But we all share one faith in Christ. It is true that this faith may lead us into different opinions and different ideas. This faith may lead us toward different conclusions about some theological beliefs and political beliefs.

But together we are called to bring our various gifts together to follow God and to fish for people. To not be like Jonah and run from using our gifts as a part of a community of faith. But we are invited to be like the four fishermen who dropped their nets, followed Jesus, and became leaders in faith communities.

Fishing for people means that we have a responsibility to build up the body of Christ. It means that we eagerly find ways to share our gifts to build up the body and expand our influence. It means we overcome our personality differences and personal likes and dislikes to find ways to build up the body.

Fishing for people means a commitment to influence our culture and influence our culture in positive and productive ways. To help our families and to help our community more accurately reflect the reign or culture of Christ. We make a stronger influence when we are together than when we are a collection of individuals.

Any athletic coach knows that he or she can have a team of great athletes who do not play well together. They don't play well together, and they don't accomplish their potential. But a good coach tries to find ways to bring the different talents together and find a way to build a team of players who work together to accomplish one goal.

Some of us who are somewhat older may remember the 1980 Winter Olympics in New York. The US hockey team was a collection of talented college players going up against the world's best hockey athletes. There was no way that this collection of US players could defeat the might Soviets and win an Olympic gold. But a miracle did happen that year.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdmyoMe4iHM>

Jesus invites us to follow and to fish for people. We are invited to be a part of a team that works together to support one another to follow our calling and fish for people and to build up the church of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

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-Texts: Jonah, Mark 1:14-20

-Given: January 21, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)