

“Out of the Boat”
 January 22, 2017
 Third Sunday after the Epiphany
 Text: Matthew 4:12-23

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights , NJ

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.

He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

As he 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.

Sunrise

Now when Jesus hears that John has been arrested, he withdraws to Galilee. That's John the Baptist Matthew writes about. And the news is troubling. John has been preaching repentance, and the news of the kingdom of heaven. And that revolutionary message has troubled the wrong people and landed John in a dark prison. But in Galilee the sun is coming up, and for Jesus it's a new day.

Jesus leaves Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

The day is breaking at the Sea of Galilee and we see the boats gently bobbing in the water, casually bumping up against the docks. The morning sun is sparkling on the

surface of the water. The gulls are screeching and the wind carries the aromas of the sea. Daylight reveals the fishermen in the boats preparing the equipment for the work of the day. It's another day, and another load of fish needs to be hauled in. It's another day in the boat.

The Call to Action

But something in the air has changed. A different kind of news is spreading across the land. It's a new voice, and this voice will interrupt and disrupt humanity from this day forward. First it was John in the wilderness, but now the voice is Jesus sounding up and down the countryside; and both John and Jesus are announcing the same thing:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

That's the call to action. A call to action is rare. It interrupts the movie of our lives that we passively watch and move along to with minimal effort. But the genuine voice of calling is strong and unmistakable. And that voice you hear echoing across the Galilee will soon spread through Judea, Samaria and the rest of the world, and continue down through time is saying, *"Turn around and move back to God, the Creator of all. Why? Because heaven has come near."* God has entered humanity and is given voice in the person of Jesus, and now everything changes.

But this message spreads far and wide, and by necessity must be delivered by many. It will be too far reaching for any one person to carry it alone. Jesus is not going to do this ministry by himself. So, here he is at the boats. And he is looking for co-workers.

Out of the Boats

But we can get stuck. We get settled into our daily routines and become accustomed to our lot in life, whether it is good or bad. It becomes so familiar we tend to melt into our days and we stop taking risks to move beyond. We get stuck in our boats. But God is calling people to get out of the boats. Last week we heard from the gospel of John about how Jesus first meets the disciples. The gospel of Matthew tells it like this:

As Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, he sees two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they are fishermen.

Fishermen by trade; it's what they do to survive. It's the lowly position in that society they were born into, and their fathers were born into before them. This is their routine in life and they have gotten used to it. But Jesus sees their potential for something else. (Jesus always sees the full potential in every human being.) As he sees them hoisting those nets skillfully into the water, he visualizes them doing the same with people.

And he says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

That's it! That's the call. It's their life-changing call to action.

Immediately they leave their nets and follow him.

It's an immediate response; and down go the nets. It's a radical decision and it comes fast. That's the power of Jesus calling you to something. Have you heard that call? But along the Galilee Jesus is looking for more disciples:

As he goes from there, he sees two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.

And he calls them.

Three sets of eyes look up. A father and his sons working in that boat like they have day after day all their lives. But they hear a voice like they have never heard before. It's a moment of reckoning. The kind of moment that comes once in a lifetime.

Immediately they leave the boat and their father, and follow him.

A Call for Compassion

Comfort zones. We all have them, and they are not easily left behind. Everyone has a boat to climb out of. But the good news is that God is calling us out of the boat, and out of the boat we must go. There's important work to be done—the stuff God is calling us to. A hurting world is waiting for the good news. A divided country longs for reconciliation. People stuck in the darkness of addiction ache for deliverance. And because of this, our model, Jesus, the teacher, the Lord, the Son of the living God is driven by something. Matthew writes,

He 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.

The ministry begins and Jesus will not wait because his heart of compassion cannot be held back. And he will not go alone. He goes on the journey with his disciples; his closest followers; his most intimate friends. He goes teaching, preaching the good news, and healing the sick; all the while showing the team how it's done. And all of it done from a heart of compassion. But the move to compassion begins with the courage to step out of the boat and follow where Jesus leads.

The Mission from Here

Hear the call to action, get out of the boat, join the team, and learn from Jesus how it's done. Amen.