

Jesus Calls Us to Fish for People

Acts 13:1–12 (NIV) Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰ “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

In Christ Jesus who calls and equips us to share his gospel, dear fellow redeemed,

If you were coach of team in the National Football League and it was your goal to win the Super Bowl, how would you go about building a winning team? Who would you want on your team? Skilled players, right? You’d try to get the best quarterback, the best running back, the best receivers, the best players at every position. You’d never think to enlist just anybody off the street. You’d never win a game that way, let alone the Super Bowl. And yet, when it comes to something so much more important than a football game, when it comes to putting out a message that spells the difference between eternal life and death, Jesus does the unthinkable. He enlists sinners like us to tell others all about him and what he’s done to save all people from sin. Jesus calls us to fish for people. As his spokespeople, 1) we are proof of his grace; and 2) we are proclaimers of his truth.

“Fishing for people.” That might sound like an odd way to talk about working for Jesus, but that’s what Jesus himself calls it as he brings a couple of fishermen to faith in his promises and then recruits them to speak those same promises to others: **“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Mark 1:17).**

Those fishermen, Simon and Andrew, were not highly educated men, skilled in the art of persuasive oratory. I suppose their fellow Jews might have considered them backwoods hicks. But that was nothing compared to what they thought of some of Jesus’ other disciples, among whose number was a former tax collector and few others who were at one time known to be religious radicals and political extremists. It must have looked like a ragtag group.

The same is true of the men we meet in our text. You might think of them as second-generation disciples. Some years have gone by since Jesus’ death and resurrection. The church in Jerusalem has suffered persecution. Much of its activity has moved northwest to a place called Antioch. There, through his gospel, the ascended Lord Jesus is still calling to himself a diverse group of disciples, some of whom would seem to be very unlikely followers of Jesus – like this man named,

Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch). That would seem to indicate that he was a close relative of the very man who had beheaded John the Baptist and who had teamed up with Pontius Pilate to crucify Jesus. And yet, this man, who was once as close as could be to Herod, is now a prophet and teacher in the Savior's church. Amazing, and yet not quite as amazing as the fact that Saul, the would-be destroyer of Christianity – a man with blood on his hands – martyr's blood is also a leader of the church. And not just a leader, but a soon-to-be missionary. How does this happen?

It happens by God's own call. Today we get to look in on a divine call meeting that took place the better part of two thousand years ago. **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2).** Here Barnabas and Saul are being called into what we often refer to as the public ministry. A more fitting description might be "representative ministry" the same type of ministry to which your teachers, staff ministers and pastors are called. We have the privilege of ministering, that is, serving on your behalf, doing publicly what each Christian is called to do privately. Instead of each member of the congregation taking turns standing in this pulpit, you gather as the church and, by the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction, you ask a few of your fellow Christians to represent you in this work – your work. The fact that there is a public or representative ministry doesn't diminish, in any way, the need for and the importance of our individual service in God's kingdom. Every disciple of Jesus is called by the Savior to share his good news with others, and so, fish for people.

I say this because sometimes we are tempted to leave "ministry" to what we might think of as the "professionals." It becomes a ready excuse doesn't it? After all they're trained to share the gospel. A Christian in the pew might say, "Who am I to talk about Jesus?" That's a great question, one that each of us must come to grips with, whether sharing the gospel from this pulpit or with a coworker over a cup of coffee.

There is something about sharing the gospel that leaves us feeling so inadequate. At least, that's the way I always feel. I know I'm not alone. Saul who becomes the Apostle Paul refers to himself in Scripture as the "worst" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). I often think, "Move over, Paul. You never met me." Maybe you feel the same way about yourself. When we think of the shameful thoughts we have, the hateful things we say that are impossible to take back, the horrible things we've done that we and others can't forget, how could we, how dare we ever think that we could possibly share Jesus with the people we know and meet?

Paul, the self-identified "worst of sinners" has our answer: **"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life." (1 Timothy 1:16).** What's true of Paul, is just as true of you and me. This is such a powerful and humbling reminder: Jesus doesn't call us to follow him because of who we are. He calls us because of who he is – the God of free and faithful love. He calls us because of what he did for us when he took our place on the cross and suffered our punishment in hell. With his life, he earned us God's forgiveness. This and this alone is why we can and why we want to serve him. And as we do serve him, forgiven sinners that we are, we are living, breathing proof of his grace. We are walking testimonials of the forgiveness that Jesus earned, not just for us, but for all sinners. God's whose forgiveness is beyond comprehension, is pleased to reveal his mercy to the world by showing it to sinners like us.

God's forgiveness is transforming. Again, think of Paul whose life was forever, and I mean forever changed by the good news that Jesus gave himself for sinners. Paul couldn't keep that news to himself. He told everyone. The same is true for his fellow missionary, Barnabas. That's a nickname by the way. The man's given name was Joseph. Why the nickname? Barnabas means "Encourager." Can you guess how he got it? Everywhere he went he encouraged people; he lifted

their spirits with the good news that One who died to save them lives again to love them all the way to heaven.

You have the same good news, the same call to share it, and the same motive to do so – undying thanks to your Savior. Still, there's something scary about fishing for people. What if we say the wrong thing? What if we make people angry? What if we end up looking like fools? Those questions, and others like them are rather revealing. They put the focus on us. But that's not where the focus belongs. It's not about us. It's all about Jesus. In calling us to fish for people, Jesus wants us to realize that we are nothing less and nothing more than proclaimers of his truth.

Again, look at Barnabas and Saul. Recognizing the Spirit's voice in the church's call, the congregation sends the missionary team on their way. They head to familiar territory – Barnabas' home turf on the island of Cyprus. Once there, they proclaim God's truth to Jews and non-Jews alike. **They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus,⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:6-7).**

In these few short sentences from Scripture, we learn so much about fishing for people. We're reminded that even the most influential and intelligent people, people like Sergius Paulus, are searching for something that they cannot find on their own. They want to know if there is something beyond this life. They want to know if someone is in charge of all this and, and most importantly, where do they stand with him. His angry and vengeful. People are so desperate to know these things, that they are willing to listen to and fall for the lies of someone like this Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

You and I have what people need whether they know to be looking for it or not. We don't have to be intimidated by anyone's intelligence or standing in society. The same message that won the hearts of fisherman like Simon and Andrew, worked faith in a Roman governor named Sergius Paulus. **“...he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.” (Acts 13:12).** You see, we don't have to argue anyone into the kingdom – we can't. We don't have to convince anyone or pressure anyone. We don't to do anything but proclaim the truth and let the winsome Word of God do all the work.

As I said, you'd never build a football team with average joes. But if you did and that team went on to win the Super Bowl, there would be only one conclusion to draw – that team has the greatest coach on earth. We are not playing a game. We're sharing a life-giving message that wins hearts for Christ day after day after day across the globe. That happens not because the messengers are so skilled, but because our God is so loving. He packs his gospel with saving power because he wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Let this good news inspire you to share Jesus with someone in your life this week. Maybe it's someone who hasn't been to church for a long time. Maybe it's someone whose never been to church. Tell them that you want them to know and enjoy real, lasting peace, the kind that puts the heart at ease in even the most troubled times – the kind of peace that only Jesus can give. Let them ask you some questions. Answer the ones you can, and for the rest, tell them there's a place you go to always learn more. And then, invite them to come along with you next week to our Festival of Friendship. If that seems a little too intimidating to them, give them the link to our livestream. Either way, connect them to the Word and then pray for them, asking God to amaze them by the power of his gospel for Jesus' sake. Amen.