

2012.3

Mark 1:14-20

"The kingdom of God is near..."

The reign of God is as close as our breath. As close as Jesus stood to His disciples when he challenged them with these words. As close as the Holy Spirit. But so very hard to enter on our own because it is the "great reversal" of this world.

In the kingdom of God the way up is down; the way in is out; the way to lead is to serve; the way to become rich is to become poor; the way to win is to give up; and the way to live is to die. How can one possibly enter a place or a system like that when the world lives the obvious and oblivious reverse?

And yet, Jesus says the good news is that living in such a way is God's design, the way God operates. Jesus challenges all who will hear to believe that such a way of life in God is near. That we should repent, change our direction 180 degrees, believe, and follow Him. Jesus, with His life, His teaching, His Spirit leads us into this God-way of living. And then teaches us to help others live this way, too.

This message always convicts me. I don't see myself living this closely to Jesus. I think it is a moment-by-moment way of living each day, traveling a little deeper in the leading of God's Spirit. But the Jesus-way traveler is strengthened by community. We best not try to travel this way alone. There is much support and life-giving faith, hope and love in journeying with others.

Living true to Christ together is the purpose of the Church. It is the intended outcome of all true mutual discipleship and small group ministry. It is the purpose for which Christ fishes for us and catches us.

Fishing... It was done differently in Jesus' day. No fly fishing for the big one. No catch-and-release-until-you-get-a trophy. No fishing from the bank or from the shallows with a cold beer nearby. No.... Teams of fisherman worked long hours in an open boat, pursuing the schools, casting and recasting the nets. Sometimes catching many at a time. At other times few or none at all.

The image is that together we go out where the fish are, where the people are lost in this world. And we literally rescue them, pulling them out of the world with the nets of the loving Gospel. *AND the great mystery is that the church going fishing, changing lives, changing communities, changing nations – is God's subversive plan for the redemption and healing of this problem-strewn world!*

I weary of standing on the shoreline with other fisherman debating the proper way to throw the nets, or with whom I will fish or not fish; telling everyone how great the fishing is but rarely fishing; or hanging out in the boathouse taking it easy with you all because actual fishing is tough work. I weary of all the work involved in running the boathouse, the church, rather than being the fishing church. Do you?

Jesus, today, you are going out to fish for people. Help me to see them with your eyes.... Share with them your story and your compassion.... And cast broadly the nets of your Gospel-Love.

Please pray this work for the PCUSA. For our leaders. For the gathering of the Fellowship of Presbyterians in Orlando to not just design again another boat from which

to fish, but to hear again clearly the call of Christ to fish with Him. For the Presbytery Council as it meets on Tuesday, the 24th.