

“For People”

Mark 1:16-20

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The House of Hope Presbyterian Church

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The Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

At the Minnesota Zoo, they have touch pools – it’s a lot of fun – there are the ones where you can lean in and touch the rays and the bottom-feeding leopard sharks. You can wash your hands and roll up your sleeves, stick your arm down into the water and brush by the rays and sharks as they swim by. Feel the rough shark skin. It’s a big open room with the tanks for the dolphins on one side, these big touch pools in the middle, and then along the side is another touch pool – replicating a tide pool.

Tide pools are full of really interesting creatures. These are the areas that are fully underwater at high tide, but when the tide goes out, it might be only little pools are left in the rocks, refreshed as the waves hit and spray. It’s a complex, changing environment. The organisms there need to be able to handle diverse conditions – sometimes they’ll be above the water line, and collect rain, so they’ll sometimes have a mixture of fresh water and salt water. The bonuses are pretty great – there’s lots of sunlight, so algae and sea plants do really well, and the consistent wave action brings lots of oxygen and nutrients.

The community that develops is full of adaptable creatures. Barnacles and mollusks are able to eat the microscopic plankton that comes through with the waves. Starfish, sea stars - brightly colored and resilient, are able to eat the barnacles and mollusks. The fish that live in such areas, some can breathe air on the surface – Sculpin and opaleyes can dig themselves into the sand and breathe air if they’re stranded too far ashore during low tide.

At the zoo, they have a tank where you can touch the starfish and the anemones, and it crashes with new waves and spray so often, refreshing this little habitat.

It’s the area between the sea and the land, not quite either, the intertidal zone where conditions are ever changing and yet where a community of life abounds.

Today, in Mark’s Gospel, we meet four young men who are in the same zone. They are fishermen, at the edge of sea and land, at the shore where conditions are about to change, where they will have a

communal encounter with abundant life.

Mark's Gospel is the action gospel – it's quick, fast-paced. It's the shortest gospel – we could read it aloud here in an hour. It's also very likely the earliest gospel to be written, and Matthew and Luke clearly thought it needed embellishing and greater detail. Mark's gospel is also the one most interested in Jesus' actions, and we learn who Jesus is by what Jesus does. Mark's favorite word seems to be 'immediately' – a word that shows up some 40 times in Mark, twice as much as in the whole rest of the Bible. We get two immediatlys in this text alone, indications of Jesus' dynamic presence in this community of fishers. And Mark's gospel is especially interested in Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee.

We call Galilee a sea, but it is truly a lake. It's a wide, shallow, freshwater lake in modern day Israel, bordering the Golan Heights. Whenever I think of Galilee, I picture Mille Lacs here in Minnesota. It's a bit smaller than Mille Lacs, Galilee's neither as wide nor as long – but it's the same general idea. Wide, but shallow – they both only get to forty feet deep – and with good fishing. It's Galilee where Jesus walks on water. Mille Lacs, right now, anyone could. Galilee's main fish is tilapia, which locally gets called St. Peter's Fish. You can think of that the next time you see tilapia on the menu – it's what Jesus would've eaten.

In Mark's Gospel, the Sea of Galilee takes on special importance. The sea is central to the geography of Mark, so the disciples sail back and forth across it with Jesus – it's a literal place of transition, of scene changes and moving from one place to another. More than just the transportation aspects, the disciples also have critical experiences out on the sea. In Mark's Gospel, the sea represents transition and chaos, and yet the sea becomes the place where the disciples experience Jesus' divine power most clearly – when he calms the sea in the midst of the storm, and when he walks on water.

Mark scholar Bonnie Thurston says that “the place of transition is often...the place where God is most clearly manifested to us. [In] the period of liminality and transition, in the stormy sea crossings of life, when we may be most fearful and frantic, ...Jesus reveals himself most clearly as who he is.” and that “Jesus enters this chaos in a time of transition and brings order out of it.”

So here are these young people, Andrew and Peter and James and John, in the transitional zone between land and sea, next to the transitional place where God will become known to them. Still, when we meet them in today's text, they have not yet begun the journey to which they are being called.

Last week, we celebrated David Van Dyke's ten years of ministry with us. It was a good Sunday, with the gospel preached and proclaimed, with a chance to say goodbye and to say thank you. One of our

congregational gifts to him was a painting by Kirsten Malcolm Berry. She has been exhibited in the cloister gallery before, and she has a lovely style – ink and watercolor on paper, with mosaic-like images and Biblical texts written in Greek. I have a few prints of hers in my office, but we gave David and Nancy an original, with a text from the calling of the disciples from Luke's Gospel, when Jesus tells these fishers that he will make them fish for people. The image is filled with a pattern of fish, abundant fish. It connected with David and Nancy as they head to their place in Saugatuck, next to Lake Michigan, as well as connecting back with themes of abundance and discipleship.

And with David and Nancy now back in Michigan, we find ourselves in our own transitional space. The personnel committee is hard at work on selecting an interim pastor to lead us through this transition. In coming months, we will all be engaged with the work of stating clearly again who we are as a congregation, and where we hear the call of the spirit for this congregation, for this place. This is good and vital work, and I look forward to it - ready to be sailing across the sea with you all, eager to see how God is manifested to us through our sea crossing to come, to engage with transition and find the peace of our calling.

And yet, we are not yet there. The scripture passage this morning is not the vision of Jesus walking on water, nor calming the waves. We are in the transition and yet still even in the transition to the transition – the tide pools and marshy shoreline next to the sea.

The passage this morning is of these young men on the beach, on that marshy shoreline. Simon, who will be called Peter, and his brother Andrew, are casting their nets into the sea. Shortly thereafter, James and John, who are mending their nets. Jesus calls them, from this beginning, into community, as community. They are not moved just as individuals, but as pairs, partners, to be in this call together.

What's more, they're called together to gather a greater community around them. From the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, they are gathered in community, for community. Called not as individuals, but as a people, for people. Jesus' call is for people, together.

This is part of why we gather here at the church, why we worship and work, why we pray and serve. We do so not just for ourselves, but for each other. Luther professor Karoline Lewis says of this: "to follow Jesus means that you have others around to save you on a daily basis. To remind you of who you are and who you are called to be. To see you and appreciate you and celebrate you. To tell you how far you have come and where God still needs you to go. To come alongside you so that you realize you are not alone."

This is how Jesus first chooses to call to the disciples, on the edge of the sea of transition, on the verge of what is yet to come. And this is where we are called. It is not yet a time to start boldly into the sea, nor is it a time to ignore the call Jesus places in our lives. Indeed, it is still a time of immediacy, but it

is a time of being together. Of being the people of God together.

In the next few weeks and months, we will have opportunities to gather together. This week in the church there are opportunities to gather in groups large and small, to work, to pray, to study, to enjoy fellowship. There are such opportunities every week. And we will gather next week to worship, to sing, to pray, and will do so every week. The rhythm of the church continues, like the waves that wash ashore, steady and ever present.

From this transition space, from all the transition spaces in our lives, we can be as these fishermen in the intermediate time. We can gather in community, to listen for where Christ calls us. We gather to support one another, to be reminded of who we are, to step forward in faith together. For that we give thanks and rejoice.

Amen.