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Epiphany 3b

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The Good News of the Kingdom Draws People to Jesus Mark 1:14-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus is Mark 1.

After John was imprisoned, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God and saying, "The time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News."

As we went along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, casting nets into the sea, since they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come, follow me, and I will have you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Moving on a little ways, he saw James, the Son of Zebedee, and his brother, John, and they were in the boat mending nets. Immediately he called them, and they left Zebedee, their father, in the boat with the hired men and went after him. (Mark 1:14-20)

This is the Word of the Lord

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

When I was growing up our annual family vacation took us to Grandpa's cottage on Deerskin Lake in northern Wisconsin. And there we fished. As little kids we had a worm on a hook at an end of cane pole catching sunnies. Then we graduated to a rod-and-reel casting a Daredevil. And finally worked our way up to throwing Suicks trying to catch an elusive muskie. In my experience fishing meant bait and hooks.

If that had been what fishing was in Jesus' day, I wonder whether he would have referred to his gospel work as fishing for people. Bait and hook is not a good picture of the gospel. But as you heard in the text, Simon Peter and Andrew were casting a net. James and John were preparing their nets. That's how they fished in Jesus' day, with nets. You even have one pictured on the front of the bulletin.

A net surrounds the fish and draws it in, no deceptive bait, no damaging hook. So also the Good News of Jesus draws us closer and closer to him. The Good News of the kingdom draws us to Jesus as we believe it with repentant hearts. And then we in turn can cast the net as we share the Good News to bring others near to Jesus. Let's focus on that theme then: The Good News of the kingdom draws people to Jesus. Believe it with a repentant heart. Share it to bring others near.

A. Believe the Good News with a repentant heart

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:14, 15 NOV11). Notice the emphasis that this message

is good news. That's what the word "Gospel" means. Good news. Yet so often we fail to appreciate, value, and cherish it as the good news it is.

Sometimes this comes from a misunderstanding. So many have twisted those words "repent" and "the kingdom of God is near" into anything but good news. Their message comes across like this, "You better shape up. You better get your life in order. God's kingdom is coming and he's going to clean house. If you don't fall in line, he's going to throw you out. You better repent or else." And by repent they mean to do some act of sorrow or amends on our part to try and appease God.

To me that sounds like a bait and hook kind of fishing. They hold out the promise of something better—that's the bait. But only if we do our part—that's the hook. For you see, "our part" becomes some list of rules and regulations, often varying from church to church, but all claiming that theirs is from the Bible. Like a hook they pierce the conscience with guilt and then jerk people around in whatever direction the current church leadership wants to drag them. That has turned off many people from organized religion, and rightly so. That wasn't the kind of fishing Jesus did.

But here, dear friends, we must confess our own failing. It's so easy for you and me to take so much of what the Bible says and choose to understand it in a way that fails to see God's love and mercy at work. Do we look to him as the God of good news or as the God who punishes us? The Flood, the Plagues, the victories of the enemies, these were judgments from God. They were punishments against those who had turned away from him, but toward his people even these disasters and calamities were acts of love, kindness, and mercy. Do you see that when you read the Scriptures?

Do we see that in our own lives? When we face loss, hardship, tragedy, or disaster, do we question about God's fairness? Do we wonder what sin he's now punishing us for? Do we imagine that he has given up on us? Or do we run too him as the one who alone is always faithful and true, always merciful and kind, always caring and compassionate? Do we run too him as the God of good news, even when everything around us is bad news? That's faith. Faith runs to God. Faith believes the good news even as life goes from bad to worse. For like a net, the Good News draws us to Jesus, our Savior and God.

But often the Good News does not seem to have much of an effect on us. That's one reason why so many churches resort to other things to get people to do the right thing. Good news should change people. Think if you were on your death bed with only a few hours left. Suddenly the doctor bursts into the room, shouting, "We've found the cure! With this one shot, you'll recover and live another twenty healthy, productive years." What joy, not only for you but for all your family and friends! How that good news would change your life!

On the other hand, if after church today one of you came to me and said, "Pastor, with this one shot you'll recover and not die today. You could live another twenty years." I think I'd say, "That sounds like good news but I'm not sick. I don't need a shot. And I probably have a good chance of living another twenty years without it." That news would not be life changing for me, even if unknown to me I was deathly sick.

You see, dear friends, our failure to appreciate, value, and cherish the Good News of Jesus doesn't only happen when we misunderstand it but also when we fail to see how

much we need it. That's why the Bible tells us of God's justice against sin: the Flood, the Plagues, the victories of the enemies. See how serious sin is, how deadly serious! That's why the Bible confronts each of us with our own sinfulness, that fatal disease of the soul. When we rightly see our own guilt, we no longer ask why bad things happen to good people. Rather with our own sinfulness exposed the question is: Why don't worse things happen to all of us, especially me? Look at the sinner I am!

Then what good news that the kingdom of God is near! What good news that your King, Jesus Christ, has come in flesh and blood. That's how near he is! He became one of us to rescue you and me! The kingdom of God is near! What good news that he exchanged his crown of glory to wear a crown of thorns for us! He covered himself in the filthy rags of our sinfulness to die in our place so that we wear his glorious robe of righteousness. The kingdom of God is near! What good news that our King conquered Satan for us, parading through hell in victory. What good news that our King conquered death for us, rising from the grave. What good news that your King is still near. He comes to you in his word. He brings you his body and blood in the Sacrament. Through the Gospel he reigns in your heart. What good news that nothing can separate you from his love, for he is King over all.

Believe this good news, believe it with a repentant heart, a heart that sees how much you need Jesus. A repentant heart sees how much you and I need our Savior from sin and death. Without him we are lost forever, but with him we are heirs of heaven. Only a repentant heart appreciates, values, cherishes, and treasures just how good this news of Jesus is. Like a net, the good news of the kingdom draws us ever closer to Jesus.

And good news is certainly news to share. For this good news doesn't just add twenty years to your life. It brings eternal life to all who believe.

B. Share the Good News to bring others near to Jesus.

Jesus called Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to fish for people. They and the other apostles would share the good news of Jesus in a most unique way. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They could personally testify of what they had heard and seen. What's more God used several of them to record the testimony as the Holy Spirit guided and directed them, giving them the exact words. The New Testament is this written, Spirit-inspired testimony of the Apostles.

But the way the apostles shared the good news of Jesus is not the only way to cast the Gospel net and fish for people. Still today the Lord sends out pastors, missionaries, teachers, staff ministers, and others to do the work of the church on behalf of those who have called them. The Together insert informs us that there are 74 pastoral vacancies in our synod. Is there someone you could encourage to become a pastor? Might you consider serving someone way yourself? We cast out the net and fish for people as we support the work of our called workers with our prayers, offerings, and encouragements.

But the Gospel-net isn't just given to pastors and teachers, is it? Each of you has the Gospel-net. Share the Good News to bring others near to Jesus. Often that starts with an act of kindness, letting the love of Christ shine out from you. But no one can know Jesus if they only know our acts of kindness. Invite them to come and see the One who is so important to you. Let them know that church isn't just something you do on

Sunday morning, but rather here you get to meet the One who is so important to you. Here his Kingdom is near. For here your King comes to you in his Word and Sacrament and you get to respond with praise and thanks. Invite others to come and see your King. Share that Good News to bring others near to Jesus.

Whether you care to go to the lake with a rod and reel or not, remember this fishing that you can do anywhere. It's not with bait and a hook but with the net of the Gospel. It's the same net that has already drawn you near to Jesus for you believe his Good News with a repentant heart. Now like a fisherman cast that net out to draw others into the kingdom. Share the Good News of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.