

Norman Kennedy Presbyterian Church  
June 28, 2020

Sermon Series: The Teacher According to Matthew

Prayer of Illumination: God, source of all light, by your Word, you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that our hearts and minds may be opened to know your truth and your way. Amen

Scripture Readings: Responsive Psalm 13 (responsive)  
Matthew 4:1-25 (*ESV*)  
Hebrews 4:15 & 16 (*ESV*)

This is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

Sermon Title: 'Fisher-of-people lessons'

Anyone who has ever had to give a speech, or preach a sermon for that matter, has probably heard the advice – “tell the audience what you’re going to say – say it – then tell them what you’ve said.” Some have credited this advice to Dale Carnegie – author, public speaker & professional development guru or it could also be credited to Aristotle as a framework for a presentation. Regardless as Matthew writes about the temptations of Jesus this is not quite his framework – rather, I believe, it is toward the end of this chapter that we finally get to see how the wilderness temptation experience of Jesus was a hard necessity for his ministry but how we too will be ready and equipped for our witness by what we learn from Jesus here. I am thinking of that more mundane expression that children might use when comparing desserts to main course – ‘let’s eat our ‘afters’ first. The ‘afters’ here, which is the calling of the first disciples, and Jesus words to the first 4 recruits was “follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” The experience of Jesus as he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, at the beginning of his ministry is the ‘after’ experience of first being called to God obedience. What one can expect once you accept the call to discipleship is that you too will have a time of testing. And that was to be one of the first lessons Jesus would teach his first few disciples.

The days of Jesus ministry began by him recruiting some to be his disciples. We know he eventually ended up with 12 – but his seeking to find those he wished to teach and train did not all happen at once. Matthew records for us the first recruitment. The disciples being called were Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; then also their

fisherman friends James and John. All 4 professional fishermen. All 4 who knew, or at least thought, they knew just about everything there was to know about fishing. One only needs to encounter a modern day fisherman to realize that they know it all when it comes to where to fish, when to fish, what bait or lures or flies to use, what equipment is needed, how to cast, where the fish are and at what times of the day, and so on and so on. Jesus, however, would put a completely different 'spin' on fishing.

I have no doubt there was an inexplicable attraction by these 4 men to this new teacher, the one whose baptism they had witnessed and listened as John the Baptist declared "look here is the Lamb of God". Certainly, this call/invitation came to them with compulsion and with an excitement of getting in on the action if Jesus indeed was who John said He was.

Suddenly, the life of boats, nets, the high and lows of catching, cleaning and selling fish paled in comparison.

Jesus words –"follow me, and I will make you fish for people" though must have sounded strange. They knew a lot about fishing – or so they thought. What could Jesus teach them about fishing? The whole of the Gospel of Matthew, as also the other gospels, will tell us so much about the master teacher and the lessons He had for his disciples then, and for us today, to learn.

The 'lesson' in this chapter of Matthew 4 is found in the temptations of Jesus.

And I want us to grasp the context of when, and where, and why.

Jesus is beginning his ministry and what happens to him, and how he deals with this is a teaching moment for all who would become 'fishers of people' – those who were to be his earthly disciples and all of us who since then are called disciples and followers of Jesus.

Matthew shows us Jesus ministry so we will know the ministry we too are called and equipped to do.

Quite immediately after Jesus is publicly announced as God's messenger, after just being mightily blessed and declared to be the one greater than John the Baptist; after an 'out-of-the-clear blue' sky a voice declared Him as God's son, God's beloved – Jesus – is led into the wilderness. Led by who? *Wasn't it Flip Wilson who made popular the phrase – "the devil made me do it"?* But no so here – it was the divine Spirit which led Jesus – not into temptation- but into the wilderness and He is led there specifically to be tempted. The story of Job comes to mind when Satan asked to bring suffering upon him so that Job might curse God – yet in Job's life, in the life of Jesus, and thankfully in our lives we can know for sure that the God of heaven and earth is always in control. God, by His Spirit leads – and in this case led Jesus into the wilderness. We will find out later

though that what happened in the wilderness, during that 40 day period, did not stay in the wilderness but was meant mostly for our learning.

There the devil, by the way the devil is a real presence although he is not described in any physical way (so no indication that we should imagine red suit with horns and pitchfork!) – but he, the devil, is the tempter. We met him in Genesis, in the Garden of Eden, in the temptation directed at Eve – and concluding in what we call 'the Fall' – the fall away from perfect harmony with the Creator.

The temptations presented to Jesus were all verbal – by suggestion and argument, by introducing thoughts and possibilities to the mind. And these temptations came to Jesus at his physically weakest moment. I don't know about you, but I do know when I am physically tired than I am not alert mentally either and emotionally I am on edge. Jesus, likely, was experiencing the same. How clever then, that the devil would use mere suggestions to which a tired person could easily succumb. May this be a warning to us all – beware the wily tactics of the devil especially when we are weak.

Jesus' time of fasting over those 40 days was not meant to prove what he could endure, but fasting was for the purpose of focused communication with His heavenly Father about the ministry which was to begin shortly. With no distractions for that entire period Jesus was in the classroom of His Father, getting ready to fulfill all that the Father had ordained. Yet, still his fasting left him hungry – and empty. **Empty desires to be filled.** God provided manna to satisfy the physical hunger of His people in their physical wilderness – would God not respond to His Son in a similar way if Jesus would merely ask for a stone to be made into a loaf of bread? Jesus saw this for what it was – a challenge to his perfect trust in his Father's good care. We get confronted with the same – we say we believe God cares for our well-being but from time to time we doubt. Doubt and trust do not co-exist. You & I either doubt and so try to take care of things in our human ability or we trust and wait for God to provide all that we need when we need it. At his baptism, Jesus was given the clear assurance that God was deeply pleased with him – even before His ministry began. Jesus didn't need to have stones turn to bread to confirm His Father's love and care and provision.

The lesson for those who would be fishing for people would be to know and be confident that the One who called you has declared you to be His beloved sons and daughters. And God would care for and provide for their every need. They no longer would have an income from fishing, but they could trust that God would provide what they need, when they need it.

Jesus, for sure, was physically weak while in the wilderness but he was spiritually strong – he was in constant communication with his Father. He was fully and completely

immersed in knowing the heart of the Father. But the second temptation of the devil was in asking Jesus to demonstrate his faith. "Put your money where your mouth is" is another way of describing this temptation. Impress people with the power of God. Jesus knew his ministry would include the miraculous but such would never be for show or dramatic effect but always because of love and compassion. Those who would be his disciples would need to accept this way of living, and of doing life and 'fishing for people.' Yes, in fishing, the stories are always about 'the big one that got away' or the greatest spot to pull in the most fish. After Jesus temptation experience in the wilderness, and when he comes to call His disciples – this is a 'fishing-for- people' lesson they will need to learn. The kingdom will not be about the biggest and the best and the most – it will be about faith like a mustard seed, about the little and the least, about faith that grows and the one who can rejoice over one small coin or deed.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> temptation the devil initiated was to challenge if Jesus was truly the 'called' one whose purpose would be to save the world – because this would be a huge undertaking – and from time to time some of the 'kingdoms' – whether physical or spiritual would be Satan's domain – therefore the devil was offering a partnership, a compromise. As Messiah Jesus could save some of the world – so the devil thought – but the whole world...? This temptation was about divided loyalties, and partial success. Surely the whole world was out of reach – at least as the devil assumed. In John's gospel, the most famous of all Bible verses tells us otherwise – **Jesus loved and loves the whole world!** Therefore, Jesus responds to that temptation with full and complete obedience to fulfill all that God has given him to do.

The lesson for those who would be fishing for people would be that obeying the call to leave their previous job behind and to follow Jesus would be/will be a life-time / full-time commitment. To mix the metaphors Jesus said the same when he talked about putting your hand to the plow and never turning back.

What then is the section of Matthew's gospel saying to us.

A few things.

We, who love and commit ourselves to Jesus, are those who could be called the 'fishing-for-people' today. When Jesus called for followers, he actually was calling for those who would learn from him and then go and do as they had been taught. All of us who know Jesus and have committed to be his followers today are also challenged to go and do as we have been taught. We must go fishing. But when we go, we too may end up in the wilderness (a mixing of metaphors again!). The wilderness is where God will meet with us and prepare us for the hard work that is ahead. Yes, there may also be temptations – we may be challenged about our faith and commitment and intention to give all to the task. Jesus, went before us in the experience that brought him to be fully obedient and

fully committed to fulfill His ministry. The recruits, the first disciples, knew that by the example and teaching of Jesus, they too could take on a ministry of fishing for people.

Matthew follows up this part of his Gospel with Jesus picking up where John the Baptist left off – preaching and teaching repentance and preparing for a new kingdom. That kingdom will be explained in the coming chapters. Read ahead if you will for next week when we learn from the Sermon on the mount.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

Amen.