

2008 January 27 / Matthew 4:12-23

Joke: *Since we will be talking about the first Disciples and since they were fishermen, I thought I share one of my favorite fishing jokes with you.*

Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll never work again.

Today I want to talk about *Repentance and the requirements of Discipleship*. The lectionary has us back in the gospel of Matthew so let's review what Matthew has told us. The reason we do this is that we keep the stories of the 4 gospels separate. The temptation is to mix them all together but God has chosen to have 4 people give their own account of the good news of Jesus. It's the same truth but each tells the story in their own way, emphasizing things they and of course God think we need to know. You wouldn't take parts of 4 different pictures and blend them together. Each gospel writer paints a distinct picture of Jesus.

Well I digress. To recap Matthew Jesus is born of Mary, Baptized by John in kind of a commissioning for his work on earth. Immediately after the baptism he is tempted by the Devil. Jesus was up to the challenge. Right after the temptation Jesus finds out John the Baptist has been arrested. Now his ministry really begins.

The first thing Jesus does as Matthew tells us (*Chapter 4:13*) *He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,* Jesus begins his ministry not in the city but in the rural area. Not among the rich and elite but among the poor. Jesus leaves the area where Jewish people live to an area where the gentiles live. Not to where the believers live but where the godless, unbelievers live.

Jesus' message was the same as John the Baptist's, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. What does this mean? If this is Jesus' message it would be pretty important to realize what it is that he wants. Sometimes I find that it helps to understand something if you contrast it with its opposite. In this case the opposite of Repenting would be to make a resolution.

What's the difference between Repenting and making a resolution? We have just past the season of resolutions. Would anybody like to share with us a resolution you made in the New Year? Some people might just be too shy to share their resolution with us or maybe its too personal. Or maybe its because they have already broken it. By today the 27th day of January I would imagine that there are not too many resolutions that have not been broken.

A resolution is saying I don't like what I have been living my life, I resolve to change. Maybe they are looking to stop smoking, trying to eat right, be more organized and on and on. The key though is the idea that even though I have failed in the past, I know I can do better. And you resolve to do so.

Repentance is just the opposite. They both see that there is something wrong, both see that changes need to be made but the repentant person doesn't say, "I know I can do better". The repentant person says "I can't do it". I've tried to change but I just can't do it. I can't do it, I place myself in the mercy of Jesus. I can't live on my own, with my own strengths, abilities and efforts. I need Jesus. Daily repentance is a daily reminder of the fact that we can't but Jesus can. Repentance is letting go of our own self reliance and totally relying on Jesus.

Once upon a time in a land far, far away was this guy named Peter who wanted to go out for the swimming team. The only problem was that he was never on the team before. He never went to swimming lessons. Peter had never even been in a pool before. The coach told him he would teach him how to swim but it would take a long time and a lot of work. Peter said, thanks coach, but it's not

necessary. Peter had been on the football team and had done very well so he thought, I can do this. How hard could it be?

The first day of practice he shows up in full football gear, helmet, pads, cleats and runs on to the field. The only problem was that it wasn't a field it was a pool. So what happened? He sunk and one of the coach's lifeguards had to pull him out. Now you want some help? No thanks Coach, I can do this.

Peter had also been on the Hockey team. He showed up with pads and skates and skated out on to the ice. The only problem was the water wasn't that cold. The skates sent him right to the bottom. It took two of Coach's lifeguards to pull him out. Now you want some help? No thanks Coach, I can do this.

Peter had also been on the baseball team. So he showed up in full uniform, hat glove, spikes, bat and one of those donuts they put on the bat to increase its weight. Well as you might imagine he went right to the bottom. As the coaches lifeguards tried to pull him out of the pool the bat got wedged in the ladder and the bat got tangled in his shirt. He swallowed a lot of water and drown.

The swimmers didn't know mouth to mouth, so the coach took over and saved his life. Peter said, Coach thank you for saving my life. Your welcome, I'm just glad you're alright. And coach, I can't do it on my own. Would you teach me how to swim. The coach said sure but it won't happen overnight and it will be a lot of hard work. That's ok. And you will have to listen to me and follow my directions. I really don't have a choice Coach. I want to swim but I can't do it on my own.

That's the kind of repentance Jesus is looking for. And it's not a once and for all thing. I think this is why I love Luther's explanation of the third Article of the Apostle's creed, The part about the Holy Spirit. I believe that I cannot by my own understanding of effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with its gifts and kept me in the one true faith.

Do you ever have trouble understanding why God chose people undesirables as key figures in Jesus' life, like shepherd's to be the first to witness Jesus' birth, people like the Magi that people thought were cocks' to bring the first gifts, fisherman who were at the bottom of the social status scale to be his first Disciples?

This is a story by Father Andrew Greeley for those who cannot understand why Jesus didn't use better taste in choosing those who would represent him in the world,

One upon a time a group of boys in their late teens swarmed out on the basketball court on a Sunday in January when the temperature had risen to fifty degrees, warm enough to play basketball, in t shirts. Anyway the outcome of their games was often determined by the flip of the coin which decided who would have first chance of choosing sides. The one who lost got the second and third choice and so on. It was supposed to be fair but it was also BORING. So this particular day, the kid that had the first choice picked the worst player in the crowd. Of course his opponent choose the two best players.

Then our hero choose the second and third worst until he had chosen the four worst players. These guys think they're hot stuff (not his exact word!) he said to his bedraggled team mates. They think they're going to mop up the court with us. Let's teach them a lesson. Well, the other guys were so over confident that they missed their shots and the poor team beat them 21-10. See, the winning captain whispered to the losing captain, I am so good I can win with inferior players. So there too. Did Jesus do the same thing?

Have you ever thought that you didn't have the gifts and abilities to be Jesus' representative? Actually you don't. That's what repentance is all about. God doesn't want the best you can do. God wants you to

turn your life over to him and admit that you can't do it. Then he will do great things through you. You often here athletes say, you have to believe in yourself. Jesus says, Believe in me. And all God's people said, amen.