

Epiphany 3, Year B
Mark 1: 14-20
January 25, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Called to Community:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Imagine the scene—fishermen mending their nets, tending their boats. Old friends going about their work. People who know each other well. People who know when to back off, when to ask a favor, when to lend a hand. Two sets of brothers—Andrew and Simon (we call him Peter); James and John, the Zebedee boys. Andrew the gregarious one; Peter the impetuous one; James and John always competing, always trying to get the upper hand—yet people you can count on in a pinch.

People who have known each other their entire lives—James and John scrubbing the barnacles off their father's boat; Andrew and Peter fixing the holes in their nets. As they work, they talk—about the catch, the terrible taxes they have to pay, the daily struggle just to stay afloat. Then their talk turns to the prophet making the rounds in Galilee—his calls to repent and his promise of another kingdom, another way of life.

They look up. There he is. Jesus of Nazareth. He turns to them and says, "Follow me. They do. In a flash they stop what they're doing, put down their nets and follow him.

Stories like this, call stories, are a dime a dozen in the Bible. We heard two such stories just last week—God calling Samuel from his sleep and Jesus calling Nathanael from under the fig tree. There are others too—Jeremiah called when he was a only a boy; Moses who wanted to send his brother in his place; Zaccheus called down from the tree and Matthew called out of his toll booth. What sets the story we hear today apart from all the rest is that Andrew and Peter and James and John are called together.

Think of it. They are called **in** community and they are called **to** community. They are called as a group—a group of brothers and friends—and they join a band of disciples, a community of the road, a community of folks following Jesus on his journey to the Cross. A community not unlike our own. A community on a journey of discipleship.

What a journey it is! From him they hear the stories of their faith—old scriptures with a different twist. From him they learn of God's dream for God's people—a dream that the hungry will be fed, the oppressed freed, the sick healed, and the poor redeemed. They see him heal the sick, feed the hungry, reach out to those others pass by. They see him walk on water. They watch him still the storm. Sometimes they are astounded; sometimes afraid; sometimes perplexed. Yet he reminds them of the road ahead and calls them back to the work at hand. All the while teaching them the ways of discipleship; all the while drawing on the gifts they bring.

I can imagine them puzzling out just what he's saying—wondering amongst themselves just what he means. Peter getting impatient and saying to the rest, "Just get on with it

already.” All of them trying their hand at healing—sometimes succeeding and sometimes falling flat. I can almost hear the collective “Oh” when he says to them, “That kind can only be healed with prayer.”

I picture them drawing closer to together as they follow him down the road. Learning to draw on one another’s strengths. Learning to compensate for one another’s weaknesses. Engaged in the daily to-and-fro of life—teasing each other, cajoling one another, spurring one another on.

Like Andrew and Peter and James and John, we, too, are called in community. We, too, are called into discipleship. Jesus invites us to drop our nets and follow him. Jesus invites us to join in the work of the Kingdom of God—feeding the hungry, freeing the oppressed, healing the sick, and bringing good news to the poor.

Like those fishermen from Galilee, we too leave our nets behind and turn to him. Like Andrew and Peter and James and John we, too, bring along the gifts God has given us. Like them, we also bring the foibles and failings that make us human. We, too, form a community of disciples.

Together we make our way down the road, drawing on one another’s gifts, embracing our differences, balancing out one another’s shortcomings, spurring one another on, bouying one another up. Together we savor the good times; together we commiserate in the hard times. Together we make it through. A community of disciples living as best we can according to Jesus’ command to love one another and our neighbor and doing our best to heed his call to forgive each other as we struggle to bring God’s reign into being.

The key word—both for the disciples called from their nets and for you and me as well—is “together.” We can’t do this discipleship alone. It’s like a jigsaw puzzle. Each of us has piece. We can’t put it together without all the pieces. We all are pieces of the body of Christ. Together we are one body. Together we are Christ’s hands and feet and eyes and heart. Together we bring Christ to the world. It takes us all. Thanks be to God.