

St. Andrew Sunday ~ November 20, 2011 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Deuteronomy 30.11-14; Romans 10.8b-18; Matthew 4.18-22

The day started like so many others. Awake in the dark hours before the morning's glow creeps out of the Sea of Galilee across the eastern horizon and into the cloudless sky. The old man wakes his sons, throws water on his face, and tears a piece of bread from the loaf on the table. The young men do the same and then follow their father on the dirt path and into the darkness.

Fishing isn't a job. It's a way of life. Day by day by day the sameness nets a few fish, no fish, a lot of fish. A few fish feeds the Zeb'edee family. Lots of fish are bartered and sold in the village of Capernaum. Whenever possible the extra catch is dried in the hot Mediterranean sun for the lean times. Too often, it's no fish but that's the way things go.

When they arrive on the shore, two hired men have already pulled the 20-*something* foot boat to the water's edge. The boys, James and John, drag the nets across the rocky sand beach and into the sea to rinse them before hoisting them over the gunnel and into the vessel. Zeb'edee looks east and glimpses the first silver sliver of light that announces dawn. A breath of wind kisses his face.

Wordlessly the boat is readied. Zeb'edee climbs aboard, as do his sons and one of the other men. The straggler pushes the craft into deeper water, then pulls himself across the stern. James hoists the small cantilevered sail and the five slowly move east to their fishing spot.

Others, like Zeb'edee and his crew, ply the waters off the coast as well. After all, Capernaum is a fishing village and that's what most people do.

The early hours pass. Nets are cast and gathered in. A few fish are thrown into a woven basket. It's not a very good day. Maybe the fish went north ... or, south.

With the sun climbing, Zeb'edee steers back to shore and beaches the fishing boat. Fish feed morning and evening. They'll come back out at the end of the day. Maybe the fishermen's luck will be better then. The two hired hands straighten up lines and the sail; James and John mend nets. Zebedee guts the fish they caught and throws the innards overboard where sea gulls swoop after their own breakfast.

Suddenly, a whistle shrieks. All look up. On the beach, perhaps 20 yards away, three men stand looking at Zeb'edee's crew doing their work. One older, a short fellow wearing a brown robe, beckons with his arm and shouts, "James. John. Come on. Follow me, and I'll have you fishing for people."

The brothers look at each other and James says, "Jesus." John smiles and drops the net he's working on. He stands and hops off the boat. James follows him and throws his arm across John's shoulder. Together they amble up the beach toward the interlopers. Now, there are five—Andrew, Simon, Jesus, James, and John.

Zebedee watches his sons and the other three stride over the sand dunes and out of sight. 'Wonder what he means by fishing for people?' Zeb'edee mutters.

Zeb'edee knows Jesus. The boys know Jesus, too, and Simon and Andrew are long-time friends from the village. Unlike the other young men, though, Jesus is different. Not odd different. It's just that he looks at the world in ways no one else does. He has ideas. Ideas about ... about how to be a person, about respect for yourself and for other people, about loving and being loved ... being loved by God. Jesus seems to be ... to be ... it's as if Jesus is filled up with a special life-force, like the energy and power of the wind.

That morning, Zeb'edee doesn't imagine that Jesus, Andrew and Simon, his two sons, and dozens and hundreds and thousands of others will create a movement to change the world. But, the *Way* does start on this beach outside Capernaum and spread throughout the area. Even after Jesus is killed in Jerusalem a few months later, the movement continues. James and John, Andrew and Simon, do become fishers of people as they share and spread the *Good News*, as Jesus calls his message.

And that special wind-like life-force that Jesus has ... it is pure *Spirit*. Mary Magdalene understands it most clearly. She even sees Jesus as alive after he dies. He's still right there to her—the Christ Spirit of God.

*Amen.*