

A few years ago, I was watching a TV miniseries based on the Bible. I can't remember what it was called, but it was long before "The Chosen". At any rate, I remember there was an episode that was loosely based on today's Gospel: After Jesus calls Peter to follow Him, Peter asks Jesus "What are we going to do?" And the actor portraying Jesus says, "Change the world!"

All throughout history, there have been lots of plans devised by lots of different people to try to change the world. Some of those plans have been successful, like the invention of the lightbulb, the automobile, the personal computer, the Smart Phone, and don't forget about Velcro!

Unfortunately, some people have tried to change the world by starting their own religious system. For argument's sake, what if you wanted to start up a religion today that would turn the world upside down. How would you begin? Where would you start? What kind of people would you hire to help you? How would you draw people to yourself and what kind of people would you want to draw?

Let's analyze this by using some good old-fashioned "Conventional Wisdom", that is, what would *seem* to make the most sense to get the job done. Conventional wisdom would dictate that you start your new religion off in a very high-profile way. You start "where the action is," where you can get the most publicity, make the biggest media splash. In our day that might be New York, Los Angeles, or Washington D.C. On the global front we might think of London, Paris, Tokyo, or any number of cities known for their political and economic power. Conventional wisdom would say that you should surround yourself with high profile people, movie stars, popular musicians, social media influencers, and even some prominent politicians. Win some of them over to your cause and the masses will follow. You'd also look for successful businesspeople, religious leaders, intellectuals, people who could work the media, communications specialists. Then you would definitely need a couple of experts in information technology and the internet. You would look for "team players," success-oriented people. Beautiful people who carried with them a great air of success.

Conventional wisdom suggests that you would kick things off with a bang, a huge event, with all the cameras rolling. You would really want to begin on a strong note, with a show of power and wisdom. If you're going to get people to follow you, you have you strut your stuff.

That may be the conventional wisdom, but God is very *un-*conventional. Galilee is a foolish place to begin a religious movement, to our common sense anyway. Jerusalem would have been the sensible choice or maybe Rome, but not Galilee. Galilee was the “hick country” to the north. The residents there spoke with a thick accent. They weren’t the most educated or even the most pious for that matter. Galilee was about as far away as you could get from Jerusalem, and still be in Israel. Gentiles to the north, Gentiles to the east, and if you were unlucky enough, your daughter brought one home to be your son-in-law. Galilee was definitely a backwater place, far from the religious and political action. Sure, there was some good fishing up there, but not much else. It almost sounds like I’m describing northern Minnesota, doesn’t it?

And yet there was this prophecy from Isaiah that had been bouncing around for 700 years: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, *Galilee* of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Galilee was the first part of Israel to fall to foreign armies from the north. The first to plunge into darkness. Galilee failed to defend the north from attack by the Assyrians. Galilee was the loser. But there is grace. Galilee would be the first to see the light of dawn, God promised.

Jesus went from His hometown in Nazareth to set up headquarters in Capernaum, a little fishing village near the sea of Galilee. Not exactly the place to make a huge beginning, is it? (No, the only big splash you’re going to make up there is by jumping in a lake!) **But**, God loves to work out of the spotlight, behind-the-scenes, away from the centers of politics and religion, between the headlines, and out of sight of the media. He undermines the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent. Little lowly Galilee is the first to hear the good news from the mouth of God Himself; “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” God reveals His

pattern: He saves from the bottom up, not the top down. He begins with the least and lost and lowly.

Already here we catch a sneak peek of God's universal grace. Jesus is not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. The crowds that followed Him came from all over. Jew and Gentile alike followed Jesus. He came to save them *all* in His death. "The kingdom of God is near," He announced. God's reign over His creation was near- as near as Jesus was near.

And it's nearer still to us here this morning. Nearer *here* than in Galilee. As near as Baptism and the Word near, as near as Christ's body and blood. This little place in Glencoe, Minnesota is also Jesus' place. This congregation and school are His base of operations, His Capernaum. It may not seem like much in the eyes of the world, but the God who delights to work behind-the-scenes and away from the spotlight doesn't need much, not when His strength is weakness, and His wisdom is foolishness.

His choice for His first disciples seems pretty foolish too. Galilean fishermen. Rough working men, uneducated. Not exactly "people persons." Men who were more at home cleaning fish and mending nets. Two brothers, Peter and Andrew, were casting a net into the sea. They heard a voice calling to them from the shore. "Follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Next came James and John, who were mending their nets in their father's boat. *Now* their net would be Jesus' death and resurrection, a seamless net, that would embrace the world in its death. Now the catch would be men for whom Jesus died.

"Fishers of men" aren't bait fishermen, luring people into the kingdom with a religious cheese ball at the end of a hook, reeling them in one at a time. This is *net* fishing, hauling ashore whatever gets caught in the net- the good and the bad, the popular and the unpopular, the religious and the unreligious. And the net is not a net woven out of our cleverness, but it's the net of Jesus' cross and resurrection by which He draws all people to Himself. Their catch would already be caught for them in the net of Jesus' death. They just had to haul 'em in- baptizing, teaching, and feeding them.

Galilean fishermen. Not theologians, not Bible scholars; Fishermen. We sometimes get the notion in our heads that we need years of education and a bunch of degrees after our name before we can speak the Good News about Jesus to others. We might get the idea that we aren't qualified for discipleship. We don't have the experience, the wisdom, the strength. But that wasn't the point of Jesus choosing the disciples. Jesus chose His disciples- as He chose you and me -not so they could look down on the rest of the world, but to make an example out of them for all the world to see and be amazed. He chose them by **grace**, without any qualifications, merit, or worthiness in them whatsoever. He chose them to be signs of salvation to the world. And in His choosing them, He shows the world how it's saved. By **grace**, a gift given when you least expect it, or are even looking for it.

Galilee. Fishermen. Preaching, teaching, and healing. A cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem. We wouldn't do it this way. This is not the way we would change the world- to rescue it. But then, we're not God, and that's a good thing! The foolish wisdom and the weak strength of God is this: The Son of God is a man who dies and rises, and in His death and resurrection the world is redeemed and reconciled to God. God reaches down to the least and the lowest of our humanity, in our sickness, our sin, our disease, our death. He touches us in the humble way of words, baptismal water, in the way of bread and wine of Holy Communion. He justifies sinners, He declares us innocent in the death of His Son. He calls sinners to be disciples, to be His hands and feet in the world, to be salt and light to tell the good news to a world so desperate to hear a piece of good news.

Jesus has chosen you to follow Him. Your Baptism tells you so. He's calling you here today in this unlikely way. You. He's not calling you to leave your work and your family. He's calling you to follow Him where you are through death to resurrection, to live in the freedom of His forgiveness. That's the kind of Savior Jesus is. He is the only One Who could come into this world to make the change that brings about our salvation. But gladly, willing, and lovingly He does it all for you to make you a disciple for life! Amen.

The work goes on today. The Lord used Galilean fishermen back then; He uses us today. When Jesus says, “I will make you to be fishers of men” (v.19), it’s important to note that not all of Jesus’ disciples will function in His service in the same way. Throughout the centuries only some of Jesus’ disciples are “sent” in the narrow sense of the term, for example Christians who have served as pastors, missionaries, Lutheran Day School teachers, and Directors of Christian Education. Not all disciples or “followers” of Jesus perform the same function or work. Without a doubt all Christians who do good works in Jesus’ name will reveal the Father to the world around them, that is, as salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

Expanding on the net-fishing metaphor a little bit, we could look at it this way: Not all of Jesus’ followers will be in charge of hauling ‘em in by baptizing, teaching, and feeding them. Some Christians will steady the boat, some will repair the nets, and others *will* actually cast the nets and gather the precious catch of human lives for Christ. But *everyone* has an important part to play, though we don’t all play the same part, everyone, every Christian has an important role to play in this kingdom work of catching disciples for Christ; in “making disciples for life”.

In the centuries since the call of the first disciples, Jesus, through His church, has continued to call and equip His disciples to “make disciples.” First Lutheran has been blessed to be a blessing in this regard. Since 1884, many, many teachers have worked side-by-side with the pastors and the congregation members of First Lutheran to teach and share the Good News about Jesus, and thereby making disciples for life.

When a teacher begins his or her work they make this promise, and I’ll paraphrase from the LSB Agenda, to be: “trusting in God’s care, [seeking] to grow in love for those (they) serve. They are always [striving] for excellence in the use of their skills, and [adorning] the Gospel of Christ with a godly life” (LSB Agenda, p. 216).”

To this day, Lutheran schools throughout all 35 districts of the LC-MS continue to make disciples “of all nations.” Here at First Lutheran School, every trimester a new mission project is chosen to receive the offerings received in the weekly chapel service.

“This year, the students have collected offerings to be sent to Ukraine. This trimester they are collecting offerings for missionaries in India. In

previous years, the students have supported missionaries from our congregation, like Pastor Vance and Linda Becker and Samantha Welch. Last year, students also gave chapel offerings to the walking path at Glencoe Regional Hospital.”

We have heard Jesus say, “Let the little children come to me,” and we are humbled to help make disciples of little children. We are grateful for the fruits of these children’s faith which are seen in so many ways. We are very grateful to the teachers and staff, who are dedicated to their work. And we are very grateful to you, the members of this congregation, who through your offerings and prayers support this very important work in God’s mission field. Indeed, Lutheran schools make disciples for life and for eternal life.