

## **“Going Net Zero”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
January 22, 2023 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

[Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23](#)

Please pray with me: “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen”  
(William Sloane Coffin).

“Drop the nets, set down the oars, and get out of the boats. Follow me and become fishers of people!” Jesus had recently left his craftsman’s workbench in the middle-of-nowhere town of Nazareth, and he had just recently been baptized as a traveling teacher and healer when he presented this job offer to a group of fishermen as they worked by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He presented his message first to two brothers, Simon and Andrew, as they fished from the shore. The brothers left their nets immediately and began to follow Jesus. He called out also to another pair of brothers, James and John, vice presidents of the Zebedee and Sons Fishing Company, as they were in their boat, which had been pulled onto the shore, and were working to repair their nets with their father, the company president, after a long day on the water. The brothers joined Simon and Andrew in accepting Jesus’ offer. They too immediately stopped their net-mending work, jumped out of their boat, and then left their family business -- and their family -- to begin a new way of life as followers of Jesus and fishers of people.

I wonder what made Jesus’ offer to these four fishermen so compelling. It certainly wasn’t the promise of a big paycheck. Jesus never said to them that fishing for people would make them rich or even make them any money at all. In fact, in putting down their nets, they would be giving up their livelihoods, going “net zero,” to follow Jesus, leaving the work that enabled them to eat, maintain homes, and enjoy life’s comforts.

Also not included in Jesus’ offer was the promise of a better work-life balance, enabling the fishermen to enjoy more family time. Rather, these fishermen would have to leave their families and their homes behind to begin this new journey.

So what was it about Jesus that compelled these two sets of brothers to leave their nets, their families, their homes, their businesses, their stable, orderly lives to follow him? Why did they leave everything behind, and in an instant?

Perhaps they saw in Jesus the Great Light of God shining in their midst. Perhaps they knew that they, as Jesus' followers, wouldn't just have God's light shining before their own faces, but that they would engage in the good work of bringing in others, all "those who lived in a land of deep darkness," as we heard in the hopeful words of Isaiah (9:2), to experience the God's light themselves. Perhaps they knew that no matter how good their lives were as harvesters of fish on the dark sea, their lives as gatherers of people to receive God's bright, saving light would be so much better. And so -- immediately -- they took the job!

But the offer was not only made to those four fishermen on Galilee's shore on that day so long ago; the offer was given for others to take and still remains for all who would receive it. Jesus calls out to each of us to follow him and become fishers of people.

The offer remains, and the perks of the job are still the same. Contrary to what too many TV preachers would have you believe, faithfully following Jesus will not make you rich; rather, as a disciple of Christ and servant of God, you will be asked to selflessly give of whatever it is that you have been given or have earned. In being a follower of Jesus, you may be asked to trade the comforts of a secure, orderly, predictable existence for one full of unknowns and uncertainty. Being a disciple of Christ might require that you leave behind people or practices that drag you into darkness so that you can come nearer to the Light of God. Bringing others closer to the Light will require you to do very hard work of enacting God's plans of bringing light to those dwelling in the darkness of injustice. Faithfully following Jesus entails continuing his work of healing, curing disease and sickness, especially for any and all of God's creation that hurt because they are in need of justice.

Being a disciple of Christ is not a cushy job, but it is a blessed one! By following Jesus and coming nearer to God's Light, no matter what you have to give up to do so, you will gain more of God's illuminating and warming light in your own life. As you bring others closer to the Prince of Peace, and by doing work that makes peace, you will find more of God's life-giving peace dwelling in your heart.

So drop the nets! Going “net zero,” get out of the boat, follow Christ, and do the work of Christ with joy. Continue to serve Christ by serving others together. Keep doing or supporting our healing work of feeding bodies and little ones’ minds. Encourage each other to continue on the way of discipleship, especially when it is hard.

Let us all keep listening for the still-speaking voice of Christ calling out for us to follow, and let us all heed that voice and go wherever Christ will lead -- today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.