

## WHAT'S HAPPENING? – Sunday, January 21, 2024 – Third Sunday in Epiphany

Hello Westminster folks:

As noted above, this coming Sunday, January 21, is the Third Sunday of Epiphany. Our gospel reading for that day is Mark 1:14-20, the story of Jesus walking along the shore of the Lake of Galilee and seemingly 'out of the blue' calling the fishermen Simon and Andrew as well as James and John to be his disciples. This New Testament text also contains the famous line spoken by Jesus, **"I will make you fishers of people"** which traditionally has been interpreted, especially in evangelical circles, as Jesus' summons to the people of his era – and ours – to save souls, win converts, make believers out of unbelievers, and fill the church pews Sunday after Sunday.

Thanks to biblical scholars and historians, especially Ched Myers, K.C. Hanson, John Dominic Crossan and others, this interpretation of Mark 1:14-20 has been shown to be substantially in error. These academics have provided important new insights into this text by pointing out that as Jesus made his way along the coast of the Lake of Galilee, likely looking for carpentry or construction work, moving from one harbour-village to another, he saw that the brutal urbanization and commercialization policies of the Roman client-king, Herod Antipas [especially, his taking control of the Lake of Galilee's fishing industry] were making the Roman and Jewish urban elites super rich and ultra-powerful. At the same time, though, Antipas' Romanization of the Lake of Galilee's entire fishing industry was crushing local peasant-fishermen and their families, forcing many of them into poverty, day labour, hunger, servitude, slavery, or even worse.

Jesus saw too that these exploited and oppressed Galilean fishermen had grown restless, and had reached the point where they had little or nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by building a movement of resistance to Antipas' control of the fishing industry. Make no mistake about it! Jesus' call to discipleship was a strategic decision to invite these marginalized and desperately poor peasant-fishermen into a new alternative household [or empire or kingdom] of God - i.e. into a new countercultural community of loving compassion, justice, mutual aid and support – a community where everybody had enough.

Also, it must be noted that Jesus' famous line, **"I will make you fishers of people"** in the first chapter of Mark's gospel was rooted in the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures; namely, the books of Amos, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. These ancient prophetic references to **"fishers of people"** pronounced judgement on oppressors and at the same time promised liberty and justice to the oppressed. As Ched Myers has pointed out, Jesus' call to Simon and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee should be understood to be more like "Dr. Martin Luther King's struggle 'for the soul of America' than "Billy Graham's altar calls".

One other thing: in this morning's lectionary reading from the Gospel of Mark the author tells us that Simon and Andrew, James and John, **"left their nets"** and immediately followed Jesus. It should be noted that **"left their nets"** is a metaphor Mark uses throughout his gospel. And it's a metaphor loaded with meaning.

Alas, this issue of "What's Happening?" is already much too long to elaborate on this particular line. But rest assured that in my Sunday remarks, I'll be talking about the symbolic or metaphorical significance of **"left their nets"**.

Whether you're joining us in-person, or via Zoom-church or YouTube, I look forward to being with you once more this coming Sunday.

Shalom,

Rev. Del