

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

It's been a long winter and I'm ready for a change. Are you ready for a change? I invite you to close your eyes for a bit, not to doze off (although I suppose that might happen) but let's go somewhere else for a while. So walk along with me.

Kick your sandals off, you feel the warm sand, the grains of sand between your toes. You walk closer to the water, you can hear the waves lapping on the shore, now you feel some moist sand, step into the water, probably better tie your tunic higher up so it doesn't get too wet. You see your brother waiting there in the boat as you cast your net, it's circular and weighted around the edge so the edge sinks first, then the center, it traps everything below it in this shallow water you're in.

Now gather the edges of the net, haul it into the boat. Ah, there are fish inside, not many but enough to sell to the vendors. Last catch today, we eat tonight.

Look, someone's watching you, the itinerant rabbi who has been around, he's looking at you as you clean the nets. You've heard his cousin, John the Baptizer has been arrested. You've heard this rabbi is quite the healer. You've even heard him talk about repenting because the kingdom of heaven has come near. What he's said is good news, but now you're feeling a little insecure, self-conscious maybe. You turn your attention back to your work, but he's still looking at you. You can feel it. You glance his way again, your brother's doing the same. He speaks. "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Fish for people? That makes no sense at all. But he looks like he sees something that's not there, then he looks at you again, he looks inside you, you feel like he knows you inside and out, maybe better than you know yourself. You hear your brother as he splashes out of the boat, you look at him, and the two of you walk toward this rabbi. Nets, fish, life, suddenly unimportant. You answer his call.

You wonder, life as you knew it, as you know seems to have just changed, normal has a new definition, things will never be the same again, but it seems right, new vocation, a mission and a journey. Life has just been turned upside down.

Ah, you've encountered Jesus. But you say, Jesus doesn't come like this nowadays. And even if he did, you've done your time, you taught Sunday school, you were on church council, you even sang in the choir, You did some quiet witnessing at work, but Jesus never called you like that. That was way back then, this is now.

Oh my friends, I must tell you, he does come like this nowadays. You're in the church season of Epiphany and God has appeared, his light shines in the darkness of your existence. Now you remember, not just recalling old memories, but you relive Jesus active in your life, today, right now and in the days to come.

There are differences of course, lakes right now are covered with ice and slush, you'd be hard-pressed to feel sand under your feet. Yet Jesus still comes, still calls to you saying "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." It's a message more important than any other. He has spoken to you, maybe through someone else rather face-to-face. But his coming to you, Jesus' call to you is still quiet and personal. You follow by faith, with perhaps more insight into the journey than the first fishermen had, and maybe that makes a difference.

Jesus came to you with words and phrases like grace through faith, Word and Sacrament, the communion of believers, you who follow by faith know that Jesus is with you now, gathered in your midst keeping his promise, but bidding you evermore to follow. It's not always easy to see Jesus that way but you know he comes through hearing and reading scripture, through the message you hear proclaimed, you know he comes in the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism. You've heard the stories from the Bible, you know he cleanses you in baptism, that you are a forgiven believer. You know he comes to you in some way you may not understand in and through the wine and bread, his body and blood. You know he died for you on a cross and then rose again on the third day.

You even know you are to live day to day as if the future were already here, the kingdom of heaven already here. You know you're part of the communion of saints living in a community called, gathered by the Holy Spirit, that you worship together and you know it is much bigger than just the group gathered here. You know you're part of the body of Christ, but it's sometimes hard to see yourself as the hands and feet, eyes and breathing presence of God in the world, you know as you are gathered so you are sent. You are the voice of Christ sharing the Good News in your lives and in your words. You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, it's your voice and your hands that reach out and bless others, sharing the peace that is beyond your understanding, you are the love of Christ, alive, vibrant, and you fail, you fall, yet you know Jesus is there working in you and through you even though you are imperfect. You know that God is at work in you, and you simply follow as he leads, living joyfully, giving joyfully.

Like James and John, Peter and Andrew, you don't give up being fishermen, you fish for people, for the sake of the One who makes you whole. Listen! Jesus is calling, he is calling you right now, and he will never stop calling you. You are his!

AMEN