

Sermon: The One that Didn't Get Away

Year A, Epiphany 3

[Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1,4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

On Wednesday, I was at Market Basket, ready to check out. So I did what we all do, right, I sort of scouted out the shortest line. I get my stuff on the belt, and that's when the lady in front of me moves because the lady in front of her has paid and is moving out. So it isn't until that moment that I can see that there are two women standing in the cashier's slot. The one who's ringing the groceries through has a name tag that says "Caroline, 1st Year". To be honest, it could have also said, "Caroline, 1st Week". She was doing ok. The woman looking over her shoulder left her alone until Caroline held up my red pepper. "4088" she said, as my Windex went into a separate bag from my roast chicken.

Here is Market Basket, making sure Caroline gets the help she needs to get better at her job. And here is Market Basket, doing what it takes to keep me, their customer, from being trapped in a line with a rookie cashier an inch away from tears. Because we've all been there. At all the other grocery stores I have been at, there is no way that the rookie cashier would have the shortest line. I have personally said to poor cashiers all by themselves, "You're doing fine. We have all had first days on the job and they're just awful. It will get better."

I caught a glimpse of the Kingdom of God somewhere amidst the red pepper (4088) and the rotisserie chicken and the Windex. We'll get just the help we need; we'll look out for one another; we won't be made to feel small simply because we're not perfect at something yet.

I know. I get it. I also hope that the Kingdom of God is something a bit more than shopping at Market Basket. As glad as I was to get my red pepper (4088), I'm expecting more from the Kingdom of God.

But I'm willing to admit that I caught a glimpse of it. Because I did. Because I go to church pretty frequently. I'm surrounded by people who are searching for the Kingdom of God, who are so hopeful for its arrival that they show up every Sunday just to get a refresher on what they're looking for.

A couple of weeks ago, we had Bring a Friend to Church Sunday and I had a few folks saying that they would like to do that, but they didn't know how to go about it. Like, how do you ask? So when the lectionary provided today's reading from Matthew, I thought, "Oh, there's the answer." The Bible has hung in there for so long, in part because it's a pretty good how to manual. So let's actually look at this lesson.

Jesus leaves his hometown of Nazareth and goes to Capernaum. Now Nazareth was truly a tiny town, and it was known for being a small town. Jesus goes to the city of Capernaum. I'm not saying it was New York or Shanghai, but it was a city in that day and age. He's a carpenter, so if he's looking for followers who are like him, he should be in the woodworker's quarter, at the Guild of Capernaum Carpenters¹ saying something like, "I'm looking for disciples. Follow me and build the Kingdom of God."

¹ Anna Carter Florence, "A Parable Universe." *Journal For Preachers* 38, no. 2 (2015): 5.

But he doesn't. He goes out for a walk by the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was a city because of the fishing trade that was based there. He walks by the sea where there aren't carpenters but there are fishermen. And what does he see? Now I'm not a professional fisherman. As far as I know we don't have any professional fishermen in here, is that right? So join me in your mind's eye and let's walk by the Sea of Galilee. There's a breeze, and sea gulls, and the smell of a large fresh water lake. And we see nets being repaired. We see two brothers rowing in together after a night on the lake. We see a huge haul being brought ashore and the fisherman crowing that the nets weren't torn. We hear a little bit of conversation about the storm the other day, when they prayed. We see someone selling fish hand a couple of small ones over to a widow who waits off to the side.

I think it is precisely because this isn't a world he knows that we begin to see Jesus' ministry being formed. He knows he has to lead these people into right relationship with God, to love God and love their neighbors as themselves. But how can he get them to have imaginations big enough to envision the reality that the Kingdom of God is breaking forth into this world ruled by Herod and by Caesar? The Kingdom of God is like fishing all night and catching nothing, then throwing your net over the other side and pulling up 153 fish without tearing the net. (John 21:1-14). The Kingdom of God is like two brothers working patiently side by side at night in a small boat. The Kingdom of God is like facing a fierce storm and praying the 107th Psalm (*Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters* etc). The Kingdom of God is where we care for those who do not have enough.²

He goes to a place that it is not his world, where it matters that you are a fisherman, not a carpenter, and Jesus says, "Follow me." He says, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19). He does not talk to them in his language. He talks to them in theirs. He does not ask them to follow him because of what he knows but because of what *they* know. Jesus is inviting them to follow him and as they do, their knowledge is what will point out the Kingdom of God breaking into this world. He's just going to remind them of what they already know.

So as you think of whom you'd like to invite to church, let me give you three questions to ask them.

What do you want more of in your life?

What are you most proud of?

What was the best life lesson you've ever had?

And then listen. Really listen. Not what it teaches you about your own story; but what it shares of theirs. If you really listen, and ask questions, I promise you that you will catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. They may not even know that that is what they are showing you. But you'll see it. Thank them for sharing it.

Maybe in that moment, maybe you'll go home and two days later it will pop into your head. But you'll be able to say, "you know, that reminds me of a guy at my church. He knows something about that." Or, "you know, I've kept thinking about what you told me. I know this woman at my church who would love to hear that kind of thing." And then ask if you can introduce them. Maybe at coffee hour.

² Florence, 6.

Or perhaps you say, “I loved hearing what you said. My minister talks about catching glimpses of the Kingdom of God. And I think I did in your story. Have you ever considered coming to my church? I think you’d find other people there that are really trying to do the same thing, catch a glimpse of the greater good. If you wanted to come with me next Sunday, I’d be so glad to introduce you to my friends there.”

Now maybe they’ll say “yes”. In which case follow through. And maybe they’ll say “no”, which honestly is more likely. “No worries. I just was moved by your story. If it had made me think of a book or a movie that I thought you’d like, I’d recommend it to you. My church is special to me and I like sharing it with people who would probably think it was special too.”

I told you the story about the Kingdom of God at Market Basket last Wednesday because I had just finished reading an article about Jesus being a carpenter recruiting fishermen to follow him.³ About how it might have been easier to see the Kingdom of God if he looked outside the zone he was most familiar with. The author argued that we live in the heart of parables, stories which we can tell each other that start “The Kingdom of God is like ...”. So I wanted to test the theory. But I had been feeling under the weather, so I was at home except for that trip to the supermarket. I admit that I had to dig, and I get that it wasn’t the best example of finishing the sentence, “The Kingdom of God is like ...” It worked for me, and it made my day better to catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Practice. This week, maybe at coffee hour, with these people who are already here. Ask one of the three questions:

What do you want more of in your life?

What are you most proud of?

What was the best life lesson you’ve ever had?

Or ask someone to describe the glimpse of the Kingdom of God they’ve had in the last 48 hours. It doesn’t have to be perfect. It just has to be theirs.

We’ll have our next Bring a Friend to Church day on March 12th. Between now and then you can practice. You don’t have to be perfect. And if someone wants to come to church with you, bring them. We won’t be perfect either. It will definitely be a moment when the Kingdom of God is breaking into this world. And we can all use that.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. [God] has multiplied the nation, [God] has increased its joy; [we] rejoice before [God] as with joy at the harvest (Isaiah 9:2-3)

³ Florence, 3-8.