

The Harvest is great, but the Laborers are few ...

The fate of John the Baptist did not end well. Having denounced the improper union between Herod Antipas and Herodias, the wife of his brother, John is arrested. Having spent significant time down around the Jordan River as well as Jerusalem, Jesus senses from God that the time has come to move away from the darkness of Jerusalem and go north. John's Gospel makes clear that it was during that time that he first met Andrew, Peter, and perhaps James and John.

Having returned home after having been baptized by John, Jesus leaves Nazareth which was due west of the Sea of Galilee and goes to the land of Zebulun (Nazareth) and Naphtali (Capernaum). He goes to Capernaum which sat on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee.

He decides to go to where the grass is greener. Capernaum was a large Galilean fishing village and a busy trading center. Capernaum lay on the great *Via Maris* highway, in ancient times called the way of the Sea between Damascus and Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean Sea. Not only did Roman Legions make use of the *Via Maris*, but Abraham and Sarah would have traveled on it 4,000 years ago.

What Jesus is doing is laying out the *strategy* for his mission. He chooses to begin his ministry where the land is fertile, commerce is great, and the population is growing. If you will recall, John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," but Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven **is near**."

The purpose of his mission: "How can I introduce as many people as possible to the love of my heavenly Father?"

Having established the *strategy* for his mission, Jesus begins to demonstrate how it will be accomplished. He will do it by building one relationship at a time. For Jesus the time has come to build the nucleus of his followers. Once in Capernaum he realizes that this is the area from which Peter, Andrew, James and John came. Jesus shifts from *strategic* to the *tactical*.

As we learn of in today's gospel, "While Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother (Matthew 4:18a-b)." Doing what? "Casting their nets into the lake, for they were fishermen (18c)." These were men who understood the power of the human hand; they understood the power of touch. As fishermen they understood that being tactical meant being tactile as well as tactful – knowing how to listen, knowing when to invite, knowing when to pull the net in. "Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fish for people,' and immediately they left their nets and followed him (4:19-20a)."

How do you build a client base? You build it one customer at a time. A customer who believes that your product is like no other product. Jesus's tactic is to create a client base where his sales force will use the gift of touch, the tactile and the tactful, in order to net others, and bring them into a greater knowledge of God's love for all.

In the call of the next two disciples, we hear the following, "Going a little further away [Jesus] saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets (21a-b), not just casting, but fixing, preparing, mending their nets, and he called them. And immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him (21c-22a)."

Jesus wants us to know that James and John, like Simon and Andrew had whatever was necessary to do God's will. In other words, they were born with the God-given ability to invite and bring others in. Is that not what fishermen do? Now do it with people! Fishing for them not only provided work and a lively income, but also a vocation. Because it was a vocation, they could leave their father behind. God invites them to embrace a whole new kind of fishing, and as such Jesus teaches them to do what he does.

The call of Jesus involves surrender to a sacrificial lifestyle. More than likely Peter, Andrew, James and John did not give up being fishermen. When they had run out of money or when times were bad, they probably returned to fishing, but because Jesus had introduced them to the love of his heavenly Father, their lives had now changed forever. But remember it all began when Jesus told them about the love of God.

As disciples our strategy is to make the love of God known, and our goal is to bring others in. In order to do this, Jesus calls us to be tactful and to use our sense of

touch to widen the circle. Church membership is not the same as discipleship. We become disciples when we answer God's call to bring others in. The church represents God's sales force in the world. How are sales doing? Let's bring others in. *Amen.*