3rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

All Saints of North America

*And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*

            So we may think that Peter, Andrew, James, and John had it easy.  Jesus Christ walked right up to them and said, “Follow me.”  He told them to stop what they were doing, leave the life they had known behind, and become His traveling disciples. No longer would they catch fish for a living; instead, they would become fishers of men who would draw others into the new life that the Savior has brought to the world. They had to leave their nets behind in order to join the Lord in His ministry of preaching, healing, and casting out demons.   They had a part to play in the coming of God’s Kingdom, which required a radical change of life. They would now use their time and energy in very different ways.

            Actually, there’s not that much difference between how Christ called His disciples and how He calls anyone today.  The outward details may be different, but no matter what our age or our life circumstance, He invites us all to leave behind whatever nets we’ve become tangled in and to play our part in the ministry of His Kingdom.  He wants to make us fishers of men who have aspirations higher than simply meeting our material needs through our daily work.

           Remember that Christ did not start His ministry by calling the movers and shakers of first-century Palestine to be His disciples.  He went after fishermen:  hardworking, common people who had no illusions that they were important or sophisticated in the eyes of the world.

            The work of these apostles continues and we honor them for courageously laying the groundwork of the Church. No, it wasn’t easy for Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave behind the life that they had known to follow a traveling rabbi.  They surely had their own doubts and fears and faced opposition beyond what any of us can imagine.  But they still responded to the call, despite the cost.

               But in order to discern what we are called to do in the here and now, we have to listen.  We need the spiritual clarity to hear, recognize, and obey the word of the Lord to us.  Jesus Christ is not likely to appear visibly and tell us precisely what to do.  We have to listen for Him in silence and stillness.  This requires prayer, fasting, worship, and a faithful life.  It’s a matter of taking our spiritual lives seriously, of genuinely working at opening our hearts, souls, and minds to God.

            If something is important to us, we devote time and energy to it on a regular basis.  If the life in Christ is important to us, we will do the same by daily prayer, faithful attendance at services, regular fasting, confession of our sins, forgiveness of those who have wronged us. You can’t be a good athlete or musician or member of a profession if you don’t practice your skills, stay up to date on your training, and seek to improve.   You have to work out, practice, and study; there’s simply no other way.  And if we want to be in good spiritual shape to hear and discern God’s calling in our lives, we have to do the same.

            We are members of one another in Christ.  He is the Head of the Body of which we are members.  We serve the Lord together.  And if we are to serve Him faithfully as a body, we must be faithful as particular people, offering our lives to Him through the spiritual practices of the Church.

            As a parish community, we need to become fishers of men.  We need to leave whatever nets hold us back from hearing and responding to what Christ is calling us to do right here in Abilene.