

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Do You See What God Sees?

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Scripture: Matthew 4:17-20

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Transcript:

Starting in verse 17, from that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother, Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come follow me," Jesus said. "And I will send you out to fish for people." And at once they left their nets and followed Him. So Holy Spirit, thank you for being here. Pray that in these next few minutes, you help us to not just understand your word with our minds, but know your love and courage in our hearts. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen. Well, the first time we took our kids to Disneyland, they were really little. And the very first ride that they went on is that Dumbo carousel, in the middle of the park.

And when they got off the ride, they said, "We want to go on Dumbo." And we said, "No, we're going to go to another ride." "No, no. We want to go on the Dumbo ride again." So we got back in line and they rode the Dumbo carousel again, and they got off and we said, "Let's go. We're going to another ride." And they said, "No, no. We want to ride the Dumbo ride again." So I said to my wife, "They're not understanding the wonder that is Disneyland. They think it's just a stupid carousel. So we need to expand their vision a little bit." So we said to our kids, "We're going to go on another ride. You're going to like this ride, because we spent a lot of money for you to have fun. So let the fun begin right now. This is a wondrous ride. This is an amazing ride. You will never forget this ride in your entire life, because you will never be able to get the incessant song out of your head."

There's so much that we share that it's time we're aware it's a ... Right. So we went on the other ride and they loved the other ride and they wanted to do that ride again. And it's driving you crazy that I didn't finish the song, isn't it? Small world after all. Their vision of Disneyland was too small. They couldn't see what we could see, the wonder that is Disney. Now the greater things were possible for them at Disneyland in this stupid Dumbo ride. And that's the title of our new sermon series, stupid Dumbo ride because it describes 2020, right? This stupid Dumbo ride. Actually our title is, Greater Things. Just like our kids couldn't see what we saw, greater things are possible when we see what God sees.

The possibilities He sees in us, or in our school, or in our work, or in our neighborhood, or in our families, church, community, world. Through Jesus, greater things are possible. Pandemic and civil unrest and economic downturns, they do not have the last word. Through Jesus greater things are possible. And even if your life is going great right now, you are firing on all cylinders, you're loving the lockdown. You really like this season that we're in, for both of you, even if you have your life has awesome, right? Jesus still says, "I have a bigger adventure. I have greater things in store for you." And in the text I just read, Jesus starts his ministry by preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." And the kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God, Jesus talked more about that than any other topic.

And it basically means whenever things are going the way God always intended them to go. Relationships are reconciled. There's justice. The poor are empowered. Broken hearts are mended. The lonely are put in communities. And we find connection with Jesus. Jesus says, "All of this is coming." That's the kingdom of heaven. "Greater things are on their way." Do you see what I see? And then He goes from there and He recruits some disciples. And He runs into two brothers, Andrew and Peter, and they are fishing. And He says to them, "Follow me and I will send you out to fish for people." In other words, fishing is great. Fishing is good, but I see greater things in store for you. So to understand this, I'm just going to walk through this one sentence, really, little bit phrase at a time to understand how we can experience the greater things that Jesus brings us and does in us, but also through us to the world.

First Jesus says, "I will send you out to fish for people." And what this means is these greater things is something Jesus does in us. It's not something we whip up on our own. We don't experience the greater things of Jesus simply by trying harder. But it's as we get closer in relationship with Him, He changes us from the inside out and then sends us to be change agents in his world. And disciple just means learner, someone who is learning from a teacher. And what's interesting about this passage is back in Jesus' day, it was always the students that chose the disciple, or the disciples chose the teacher. But here in this story, Jesus comes and chooses the disciples. He puts it the other way around to make clear that this is happening at his initiative. Jesus, who is God in the flesh, is seeking you, is seeking me.

He is a seeking God. And He comes after us. He pursues us because He wants to do the greater things in, through, and around us, that He had in mind when He created us. So much so that He came Himself in the person of Jesus. I will send second you to fish for people. You not a generic, you. In all your particularity, you is all your strengths, weaknesses, and weirdnesses of which you have so very many, you. I will not make you to be like someone else. I will make you the you I had in mind when I made you to do that voodoo that only you do so well in all your uniqueness. It is significant that Jesus says to fishermen, "I will send you out to fish for people." He uses the language of their job, the language of their skills. He doesn't say, "I'll make you healers of people."

Doesn't say, I'll make you orthopedic surgeons. Doesn't even say, I'll make you ichthyologists, people who study fish. He doesn't change their skills or their personalities. He takes who they are and what they do and he magnifies it, enhances it, makes it bigger, greater, because He sees what the disciples do not see in themselves. And He says, "I'm going to use every part of your life, the heartbreaks, the ups, the

downs, the good things, the bad things. I'm going to use it all. I'm going to make it greater. And I'm going to focus it and channel it for greater things for eternal things." I've told you before that when I was an instructor at Stanford, I always did that very pastorally. I was the instructor always had the extra long office hours. And after I would get done critiquing a student's paper, I'd say to them, "How are you doing? No, really? What are you struggling with? How's it going? What's hard right now?" I was pastoring them. That wasn't my job. My job was instructor, but pastoring is just something I do. It's who God made me to be. And I would do that in any job I had, I would be a pastor. I could be a financial planner, but I would do it very pastorally. "But how does the bond market make you feel? That's what's important here." Jesus takes who we are, what we do and directs all of that toward greater things, toward a bigger adventure.

And it's important to notice the disciples are just ordinary folk. Nothing special about them. They're not super educated. Maybe some of them couldn't probably even read, but Jesus sees potential in them that they do not see for themselves. Not because of them, but because of what He can do through them. It's not like Jesus saw these guys and saw some kind of special talent in them, because as the rest of the story goes on, I mean, there are colossal screw ups. They just screw up all the time. No, Jesus sees the potential in them, not because of who they are, but because of who He is inside of them and what He can do through them. And so they go and they leave behind a lot because as fishermen, they weren't rich, certainly, but they also weren't poor.

They would be what we would call middle class people. Life was pretty good for them. But Jesus says, "Oh, I know life's pretty good for you right now, but oh, I see ... If you could see what I see, greater things are possible. You won't just make a living, you're going to make a difference in the world." And I'll give you an example of this toward the end of the sermon. As you look at your life, your passions, your skills, your highs, your lows, your tragedies, your triumphs, do you see what God sees? Or do you see what our culture sees in you? Do you see what parents or teachers or peers or friends see in you? Do you see what God sees when He looks at you? Because the Christian life is not a matter of you becoming more like someone who's more Holy. No, no. The Christian life is becoming who God says you already are in Him. It's to see yourself the way God sees you and then living into what God sees in you.

So then how does that happen? How does that transformation happen inside of us? Well, that's where the first part of this sentence comes in. Jesus says, "Come follow me and I will send you to fish for people." Follow me. It's a journey. It's a relationship. And in the original Greek, the verbs are in a form that indicates repetitive continuous action. So a literal translation of this would be, follow me and I will make you to be becoming fishers of people. It's a process. It's a journey. He doesn't say, "I'll give you sermons for you to take notes on that you never look at again." He doesn't say, "Here's some theological propositions for you to agree with." Follow me means to eat with him, travel with him, heal people with him, go where he goes for three years, every little thing together.

It's a relationship and it's a process in which we're transformed. And everything we experience, big things, little things, everything. Everything He uses to help us become who He sees we are when He looks at us. The last two weeks I've had cataract surgery to fix my eyes and it's a two-week process. So first they fix one eye and then they wait a week. Then you wait a week to make sure there's no complications and then they fix the other eye. And so I have this concern. One of my worries was that in the intervening week, between, that I'd get sick or someone in my family would get sick. And because of COVID protocols means I couldn't get the second surgery done and then I'd have to wait weeks if not months, with this uneven vision, one eye fixed, one eye not fixed, which is kind of weird.

Plus I wanted to be able to show up here to launch this new sermon series. So I was always saying to my kids, when they're growing out, "Wear a mask. Stay six feet apart. Do you really have to go? Can't you just stay in the house for a month? Make sure you stay outside." Choke on smoke, as I'm doing right now. I was constantly driving them crazy. Now, all through this, I was praying about a lot of things, but one of the things I was praying for was keep me well God. Keep everyone in my family well so I can have these surgeries and so I can show up and preach on Sunday. Okay.

And that's a fine prayer, but during one of these prayer times, I heard God say ... Voice that I knew wasn't mine, thought that I knew wasn't my thoughts say, "Well, what if someone does get sick? And what if you can't do these surgeries? And what if you don't show up to preach? Don't you think I could use that to help you become the you I see when I look at you? Or [inaudible 00:11:48], kind of like the third point in this week's sermon that you're writing right now? And I was like, all right. Yeah, you're right, Lord, you're right. So I switched my prayer to Lord, help these surgeries to happen. I want to get it over with. But God, if it doesn't show me how you're going to use even that little thing to make me who you created me to be. Now that's a little thing. It's not a big thing. And that's the point. Jesus uses it all. Jesus uses every little thing we do.

Every little thing we face and every big thing we face, He uses it to help mold us into be the people He sees when He looks at us. And end of the story is, I got both surgeries done. It went well, thanks to my awesome doctor, Dr. Gilbert. He goes to this church. And I'm here preaching. But Jesus will use even a little thing like that to help us be who He created us to be. Do you see what He sees? Do you see what God sees? That hassle, that inconvenience, that setback, that argument with someone, that loss, that hurt, that pain is a tool in his hand to shape you into the you he sees when he looks at you. And there are a lot of ways we participate in this transformation process, worship, prayer, scripture, but one of the most important ways is community.

Other people help us grow. That's why we are launching this fall in two weeks on the 27th, we're launching eight week online small groups that we're calling All-In Groups to help connect us, because all of us feel kind of disconnected cause this pandemic. And these groups will help us have some human connection, as well as grow in our faith. And we're doing something we've never done before. We've got trained facilitators that are going to lead these groups for the eight weeks around a curriculum that's going to be based on these sermons that we're going to give in this sermon series to help us stay connected, to help us have community, as well as to help us grow deeper in our faith and live it out more, which is vital because the greater things that Jesus is going to do, the greater things that Jesus wants to do in through and around us depend on one big if. Jesus will do great things in, through and around us, if, or maybe better yet when we are all in followers of Him.

After Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, the text says at once they left their nets and they followed Him. At once they left. They left everything behind. In other words, they were all in. Left their nets, their jobs, their security, everything they knew to follow Jesus. Soap doesn't work unless you use it. Medicine doesn't heal unless you take it. And Jesus can't do the greater things He wants to do in, through, and around us unless we progressively more and more are more and more all in, in following Him. And just like the disciples had to leave their nets behind, we got to leave some stuff behind. Old sins have to be left behind. Bad habits. We have to obey Jesus commands in scripture about serving and giving and sexual wholeness and seeking justice and forgiving others.

And the more we do those things, the more greater things of God happen in us, but also then through us to the rest of the world, which brings me to my last point. When we follow Jesus, greater things happen in us, but also through us in our world. right after the verses that we just read where Jesus chooses his

disciples, it says Jesus went through Galilee, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. In other words, He and his disciples did greater things in the world. And boy does our world needs some greater things right now, right? The only thing Americans agree on right now, the only thing everyone agrees on is 2020 sucks. Like I said, if something can go wrong in 2020, it's going to go wrong. Pandemic, economic downturn, civil unrest, okay.

Let's add fire and choking smoke and flying monkeys and singing squirrels. And who knows what's going to happen in Q4? but with Jesus, a better world is possible, no matter what our circumstance is. As one by one, we each bring Jesus healing, love and justice, wherever we live, work, play, or learn. A woman I know is a teacher and reached a point some years ago where she just was burned out, had lost the joy of her job, in part because she was just super busy. She had a ton of activities that she was doing, felt like she had to do. She didn't check that out with God, just said yes to a bunch of stuff. And so she was burned out on teaching, feeling hassled and all of that. But on the whole, her life was actually pretty good.

She and her husband made a good living. They had great kids. So on the whole, life was pretty good, though she was a little busy and burned out. And one day she was in her small group Bible study and complaining about being too busy. And she said, "It's my addiction. I'm addicted to being busy, so I'm just going to cut some stuff out." Well then someone in her small group challenged her to go a little bit deeper than just randomly cutting activities and said, "Maybe you should go a little deeper and pray and ask God to show you the way your addiction to being busy plays into someone else's bondage." So she started praying around that. "Show me God what you see. Help me see what you see and then how would you want me to respond to that?" And slowly she began to realize it there was a student in her class, and under resourced student girl who was really struggling in her class and that this teacher realized her own busyness had kept her from really understanding what this girl needed to thrive, really thinking about it because she was just so busy just going through her day trying to get through it.

So she went to this student and said, "Look, you're super smart, but you need a little bit of extra help, so why don't I be your tutor for a couple of times a week to help get you caught up?" And started tutoring this student several times a week. And then all those other things that she was doing, just sort of without her even thinking about it, naturally just faded away, all those other things, making her busy, as God narrowed her focus to this girl. And the more she tutored this girl, the more her heart began to break for under-resourced kids in general. So she started reading books to understand what's going on there and how one of the reasons that it's hard for them to succeed in school is no hope, like why bother to study and get good grades? I can't go to college anyway. There's no future for me anyway, so why bother?

So this teacher then formed a common cause Bible study. And they studied the Bible together and helped each other apply it to their lives. They were honest, shared the highs, the lows of their life. And they had a common mission, common purpose together, which was to partner with a classroom of underprivileged kids and raise enough money to send every kid in that class to college or trade school if they wanted. But also on top of the money to go to college that they raised, also to stay in relationship with these kids all their way through high school, because you're kind of mentor and guide and just encourage these students and their families. So that's what they did. And those kids did great. They did great in school. They went on to college, trade school, all kinds of stuff, breaking those cycles of poverty.

But more than that, this woman, this teacher's doing great. She loves her job again because now it's this bigger adventure that she's got. She's made all these deep relationships with the students and their parents. She learned so much from her students about perseverance in hardship, about overcoming obstacles, about faith, about courage and strength. She learned so much from them. This is not a story

about how she helped a classroom of underprivileged kids. This is a story about how they saved her. So God entered her life, took what she did, took her skills, her gifts, her job, and gave her a bigger adventure, not in a different job, but in the job she already had and helped her see the greater things that God saw when he looked at her, the greater relationship she could have, the greater adventure she could have, greater things in a pretty good middle class life.

She is part of this amazing community that is breaking cycles of poverty for dozens of families. And oh, by the way, all of this happened because she was in a small group. So you just resolve to yourself right now you're going to sign up for one of those All-In groups. You're going to be part of that for eight weeks, because good things happen when we are in community. Do you see what God sees? Do you see what God sees in you, your school, your job, your neighborhood, your family, your church, your city, your community, your world? You may not be a teacher, but you can do what this teacher did. She asked God to help her see the possibilities right where she lived, worked, played, learn. So pray, "God help me see what you see wherever I am." Or maybe it's to pray that deeper, more challenging prayer.

"Lord, show me where my addiction is." Because we all got one. Shopping or busyness or whatever it is. "Show me how my addiction plays into someone else's bondage." Maybe it's my addiction to comfort that makes it hard for me to talk about and think about difficult things like poverty and justice and racism and how I might actually be part of the problem. Maybe read some books on that. Our justice team has great recommendations on our website. And then ask God to show you how you can have the joy of being part of healing those things. Do you see what God sees? You see your sins and failures. God sees a child of God redeemed in Jesus Christ. You see your deficits, the things you think you don't have, the money you don't have, the education you don't have, the looks you think you need that you don't have, but God sees all you do have in Him. Or conversely, God sees that you see all the things that you do have, the money, the education, whatever that you rely on, but do you see what God sees when he looks at you and sees that if you would let go of those things and rely only on Him for a God-sized vision instead of those things, greater things would be possible in your life.

We see racial tension all over our country right now, but God sees the possibility that this could be the generation that finally puts an end to racism in America. We see a refugee crisis with Muslim refugees flooding into Europe making people they're afraid that they're about to lose their culture. But those Muslims are becoming Christians by the thousands. We call them refugees. What if God calls them something different? Missionaries to take Jesus back to the places that are forgotten Him. We see 2020 as this miserable year, which it is, but God sees this year as an opportunity to create life-giving new habits in all of us.

I refuse to concede defeat to the forces of anger and fear and disunity that are in my heart and that are in our world. I refuse to concede defeat to the simplistic tribalistic, false binaries of our culture that says it's impossible to support good cops while also working for better policing that ensures officer's safety, as well as that everyone is treated with justice. In Jesus Third Way Kingdom those are not opposites. Those things are two sides of the same coin. Greater things are possible than unarmed black men being shot, or riots, or lootings. Greater things are possible than an endless cycle of white people feeling confused and defensive and people of color feeling unheard and unseen. Jesus reconciled Jews and Gentiles. Even today, Jesus is reconciling Hutu and Tutsi in our own church in New Hope Revival. Jesus is the reconciler. And so greater things are possible for us as a nation and as a people.

Greater things are possible than sadness and loneliness and isolation because of a pandemic. God sees an opportunity to help us experience community in new ways. I refuse to concede defeat. Now, to be sure I have my moments of discouragement and depression. Just ask my wife. But I refuse to concede

defeat to discouragement when so many greater things are possible in Jesus. And Jesus has been doing those greater things for 2000 years. Where do you think we get the idea that all people are equal? That came from Jesus. Always before people were unequal and everyone said, "That's the way it's supposed to be." Where do you think we get the idea that compassion is a virtue rather than a terrible weakness? Which is how it was always seen before Jesus. In ancient Rome, in post Roman Europe, in the 18th century of revivals in America that led straight to abolition, in places like Rwanda today, Jesus and His people have believed that a better world is possible and have worked for it, not perfectly, plenty of egregious sins along the way, be sure, but always forward progress.

I believe greater things are possible, not because of you and not because of me, but because of what our God can do. There is no one like our God and greater things are still to come. Greater things are yet to be done in me, in you, in our community and in our world. Greater things are on the way through the power of Jesus. So Lord, thank you that you are the God of greater things. And Lord, we ask that you help us to believe that, help us to live into that. Lord, help us to step out in faith where we feel discouraged. Help us to see your greater things. Only you can do them, Jesus. But in you, we believe all things are possible. Lord, help our unbelief and help us to step in to the bigger things you have for us. We ask this in your name Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Matthew 4:17-22

1. What was the message Jesus was preaching? In your own words what does it mean?
2. What invitations does Jesus give to these fishermen? What's unusual to you about their response?
3. If you were Zebedee, how would you feel. What does James and John's decision to leave immediately tell us about the life of faith?
4. Spiritually, are you preparing the nets? Leaving the boat? Following hard after Jesus? Feeling left behind? Other?