

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 25, 2026**  
**Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23**

**"Noteworthy Nobodies"**

After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus withdrew to Galilee, where he began his public ministry, invoking the same words John had proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Now was the time for Jesus to get the ball rolling.

Like any good leader, Jesus sized up the situation in Israel and saw that he needed help to get his message out to the populace. Now, if you or I were going about the task of lining up disciples, we'd probably place want-ads in the most widely-read newspapers, receive resumes, schedule interviews and narrow our selections down to the top twelve choices.

But not Jesus. He didn't search high and low for just the right candidates for his junior executive positions. He didn't hire a head-hunter personnel firm to steal away somebody's top disciples. One day, while he was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he happened to see two men fishing - casting nets out into the sea. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of all sorts of people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

There are at least two things I find interesting in this exchange: 1) Jesus does need help 2) Jesus is very selective even in his unselectiveness. Jesus is not a Lone Ranger. Even though he is the Son of God, he doesn't try to go it alone. He does not work alone. He calls people to help him bring in the kingdom - people like you and me.

Just like Peter and Andrew, we have been called to throw wide the net of the gospel to bring people into the kingdom of God. The question this scripture raises for us is, "Who have we caught lately?"

The gospel message made its first converts in a very ordinary way, not the flash of light, mountaintop experience we might have expected. But that's the way Jesus chooses to work most often - through the ordinary. In fact, that's probably how most of us came to be here today. Many of us were brought to church by loving parents and cannot remember a time when we haven't been in church somewhere. Our parents made us come to Sunday School and church out of habit. In turn we developed the habit, except when we break the habit and inhabit the easy chair at home.

Others were invited here by a friend who was a co-worker, school-mate or acquaintance. All very unspectacular ways of netting people for the kingdom of heaven. But in all instances there was a conscious decision made to invite someone to worship. It wasn't left to chance - the net was thrown.

You and I throw a gospel net every time we encounter another person. We have an opportunity to capture or repel, depending on whether our net is weighted with the gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, or is weighed down by pride, anger, jealousy, resentment, envy, vengefulness, and self-concern. Make no mistake about it - we cast a net in every encounter.

The question is: what kind of net are we using, and does it captivate a soul?

So, Jesus does depend on us to complete his work begun two thousand years ago. He entrusts his work not just to anybody but to us, because he has selected us just like he selected his very first disciples. Even though Jesus' selection of Peter and Andrew was very ordinary, it was also very selective. Undoubtedly there were dozens, perhaps even hundreds of fishermen on the Sea of Galilee that day. But there was something in Peter and Andrew that drew Jesus to them and them to him. They probably couldn't guess what it was, any more than we can guess what it is in us that Jesus sees, because that is the divine discernment at work in Jesus.

The point is that Jesus saw something in them that made him pick them instead of any of the other hundred men out there that day. There was something special, unique about them that helped him know that they would allow themselves to be caught in the gospel net.

The same is true for us, as well. Jesus has something special in mind for each of us - for you and for me - to do for him. What that might be, only He knows. But there is a divine purpose in and for your life and mine. No matter how ordinary we may feel, God has a plan for us.

Back in the middle of the nineteenth century, a lady in a faded gingham dress and her husband, dressed equally simply, stepped off the train in Boston, and walked timidly without an appointment into the Harvard University president's outer office. The secretary could tell in a moment that such backwoods, country hicks had no business being at Harvard. She frowned. "We want to see the president," the man said softly. "He'll be busy all day," the secretary snapped. "We'll wait," the lady replied.

For hours, the secretary ignored them, hoping that the couple would finally become discouraged and go away. They didn't, and the secretary grew frustrated and finally decided to disturb the president. "Maybe if you see them for a few minutes they'll leave," she told

him. He sighed in exasperation and nodded. The president, stern faced with dignity, strutted toward the couple. The lady told him, "We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard. He was happy here. But about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. And my husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him, somewhere on campus."

The president wasn't touched, he was shocked. "Madam," he said gruffly, "we can't put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery." "Oh, no," the lady explained quickly. "We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to put up a building."

The president rolled his eyes, then exclaimed, "A building! Do you have any earthly idea how much a building costs? We have over seven and a half million dollars in the physical plant at Harvard." For a moment the lady was silent. The president was pleased. He could get rid of them now.

Then the lady turned to her husband and said quietly, "Is that all it costs to start a university? Why don't we just start our own?" Her husband nodded. The president's face wilted in confusion and bewilderment. And Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford walked away, traveling to Palo Alto, California where they established the university that bears their name, a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about.

Jesus regularly uses the nobodies of the world to accomplish His purposes. Jesus can and will use you and me to share good news with a world that desperately needs it. So, as we leave this place of sanctuary to re-enter the world, we cast a gospel net near or far, but always wide.

Every encounter we have when we leave this safe space is an opportunity to share the gifts of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. With Him as our "master fisherman" we can join the ranks of the noteworthy nobodies that cast the gospel nets for Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your where you are. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**