

January 22, 2023

## Matthew 4:12-23

<sup>12</sup>Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup>“Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— <sup>16</sup>the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” <sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

<sup>18</sup>As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup>And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

<sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

**I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Today I'm going to talk to you about fishing...well really... what it means to be 'fishers of people'.

But first a question. Can you tell me what the word **evangelism** means? It means 'teaching Christianity', especially to people who are not Christian.

Have you ever noticed, the word "evangelism" has the word "angel" in it? Angel means messenger...and the 'evangel' is the message of the 'good news' of Jesus. So anyone bearing the evangel *is* an angel...a messenger of the Lord. As followers of Jesus, we are all called to be his angels, his messengers who proclaim the evangel, the Good News of Jesus Christ; his love, his sacrifice and the grace we receive because of it. We proclaim this Good News powerfully by what we do; that is by loving others.

Jesus, walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee simply says 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And lo and behold! Andrew, Peter, James and John...immediately drop their nets and follow.

Jesus says "I will make you fishers of people." This means following Jesus involves action beyond ourselves. It involves reaching out to others.

Some of us, may feel uncomfortable with the idea of 'evangelism', and 'fishing for people'. Maybe we think of pushy TV evangelists. Maybe we shudder, thinking of people who arrived at our doors promoting their version of the 'truth'. But still...our Lord in his brief call...**did** say he would make these followers fishers for people...What did he mean? How do we understand being 'fishers of men'. Is there an alternative evangelism to a militant Crusade for Christ.

We are always changing and how we view the world today is different from the way people viewed it 50 years ago. Studies tell us that during the 1960's a great change occurred in the way we see the world. It was a perspective shift. We left the 'Age of Reason' and entered the 'Postmodern' era. In our 'postmodern' world people talk about "**preferences**" rather than "**truth**". All of us are affected by these trends.

Kevin Ford in his book 'Jesus for a New Generation' writes

*"The most urgent... task before us is to live our lives in community in such a way that those around us will come and ask, Why are you different? What keeps you*

*going? What is the hope in your heart...in this postmodern era we emphasize the hope that resides in the heart rather than reasoning.”<sup>1</sup>*

It comes down to the hard question “Can we Christians **live** what we believe?” The challenge is to “embody” our faith. It is what our Lord himself did in being born one of us. He, who was God, came in a body to be one of us.

Christians, like Christ, can demonstrate that God’s love is real. The Greek writer Plutarch noted that a person’s disposition was often best seen, not in the great deeds that they performed, but in the **small** details of their life: off-the-cuff remarks, and the like. This idea of Plutarch’s can be applied to the Christian. What people want is an experienced faith which is ‘caught’ from contagious Christians more than ‘thought’. So our goal in this Postmodern time is to become ‘contagious’ Christians who will cause an epidemic.

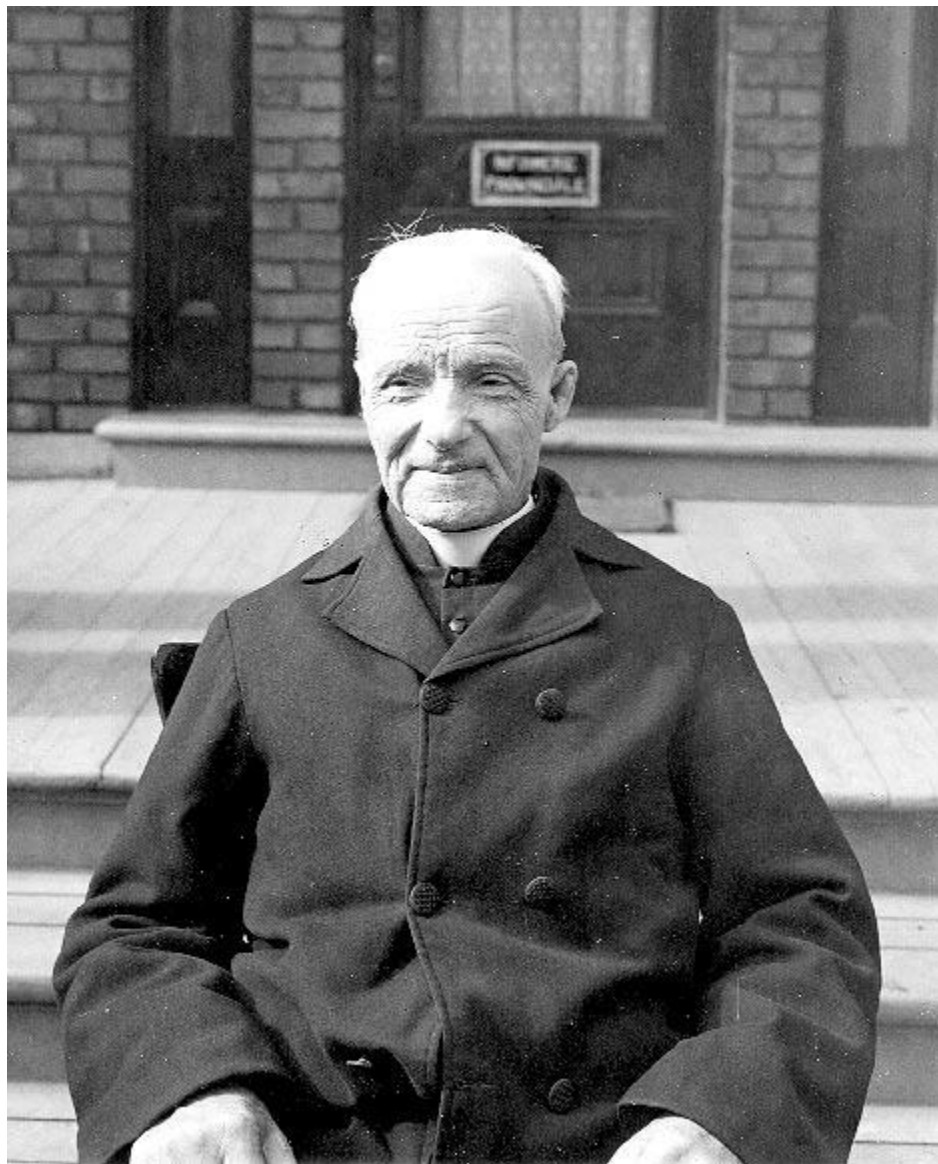
Each of us is called by Jesus to fish for people. We may think we can not do anything dramatic that will really make a difference. But God calls us just the same and can use us. Look at who Jesus called...fishermen, simple men, who were not learned nor wealthy. He used them, simple as they were for great things.

When I served in the Diocese of Montreal, I visited St Joseph’s Oratory in that city and learned about Brother Andre who is now St Andre Bessette. Do you know his story? He was a simple man who followed his call and was a fisher for people. I was amazed to find out that he could barely read or write. His frail health as a child had prevented him from going to school regularly. Also due to his poor health, he was at first refused by the Holy Cross Brothers because they thought he would get sick and need care rather than support the community. But in the end, Brother Andre was allowed to stay.

He said “When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door and I remained there for forty years.” He was the porter whose job was to answer the door. HE slept on a narrow ledge right in his porter’s office. He had been given this job because of his gentleness of manner and knack of putting people at ease. As well, he could speak English. He also helped in the laundry and cut hair.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

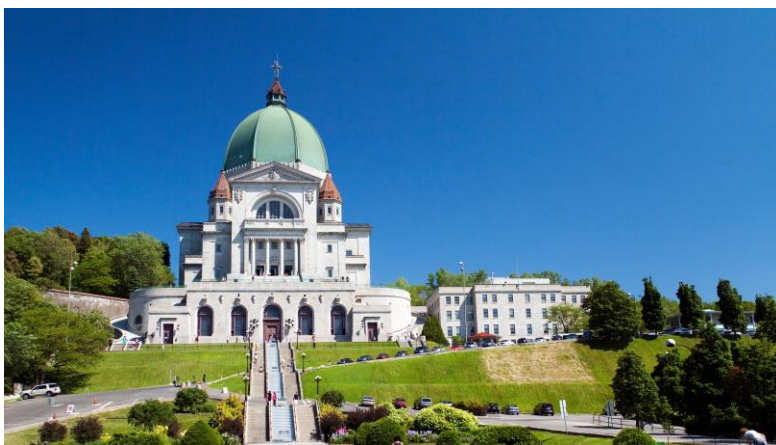


While out in town on errands, Brother Andre often heard of someone who was very ill. He would visit to cheer the person and to pray with them. He would also rub the sick person lightly with oil taken from a lamp burning in front of St Joseph's statue in the college chapel. When the health of some of these people improved, word began to circulate of Andre's healing powers. Andre always protested that it was God who healed, not he. Before long there were floods of people coming to Notre Dame College, crowding the corridors, waiting to enter the porter's office to spend a few precious moments with the healer. The numbers became too much for the college and Brother Andre began meeting his visitors at a small trolley station across the street.

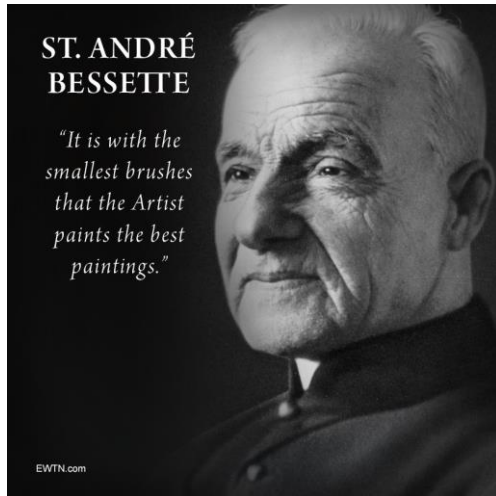
By 1904, Brother Andre had \$200, saved from alms he received from the sick and pennies he earned as a barber. His superiors gave him permission to construct a small chapel on the mountainside. It was a simple wooden shed with doors opening out onto the grass.



Later, the chapel was enlarged, closed in and heated. Pilgrims came by the hundreds and then by the thousands. Andre spent eight to ten hours each day receiving people. He greeted visitors with a smile, listening intently to their sorrows, rubbed them gently with St Joseph's oil, and dismissed them. Some were cured, many were not. But all felt better for having met him.



When Brother Andre died in 1937 in his 92<sup>nd</sup> year, over a million people came. For 7 cold January days, mourners filed past the small wooden coffin. Brother Andre loved to say “It is with the smallest brushes, that the artist paints the most exquisitely beautiful pictures.” Does this not encourage each of us who may consider ourselves to be ‘small brushes’?



An unlikely angel carrying God’s message in our world today is a young man Tim Tebow. Have you ever heard of him? He was; a great football player who was the Starting Quarterback for the Denver Broncos in the National Football League.

He gained notoriety because he proclaimed the Good News powerfully by what he did, but in a very different way from Brother Andre. This young man was home schooled by committed Christian parents.

He became famous for dropping to one knee and resting his head on his hand to pray in public places when no one else around him was praying, for example during the Broncos' comeback overtime victory over the Dolphins on October 23, 2011.





Someone set up a website showing himself and his friends ‘tebowing’. Thousands of others submitted their own photos and the site was viewed by people around the world. Some are spoofing the ‘tebow’ pose, but ...others are not. "Tebowing" was officially recognized as a word in the English language by the Global Language Monitor, due to its level of worldwide usage. At the least, ‘tebowing’ reminds us that prayer is for every day and just as real and possible on the football field as it is in a consecrated sanctuary.

Tim Tebow speaks as an evangelist as well. In the Philippines, he preached the Christian Gospel to schoolchildren and entire villages and assisted in medical care.<sup>[187][183]</sup> Moreover, Tebow supports more than 40 national evangelists working

in that nation.<sup>[187]</sup> In the United States, he has shared his Christian faith in prisons and schools, with church and youth groups, and at meetings and conferences.

He is also a philanthropist. Upon graduation, he set up the 'Tim Tebow Foundation'. The Foundation hopes to use the platform Tebow has to bring faith, hope and love to those who need it.<sup>[185]</sup> The Foundation supports a program to bring the dreams of children with life-threatening illnesses to life. The Foundation supports the construction of a hospital in the Phillipines. It also sets up Timmy's Playrooms in children's hospitals throughout the world and it supportst Uncle Dick's Orphanage, a place where hundreds of children are abandoned every year.

Last, on a lighter note, Tim Tebow will be remembered for sharing his faith in an unusual way.<sup>[83]</sup> During his college football career, Tebow frequently wore references to biblical verses on his eye black. In the 2009 Bowl Championship Series Championship Game, he wore John 3:16 on his eye black; the verse was the highest-ranked Google search term over the next 24 hours, generating over 90 million searches.<sup>[84][85][86][87][88]</sup>



Later, when Tebow switched to another verse, there were 3.43 million searches of "Tim Tebow" and "Proverbs 3:5-6" together.<sup>[89]</sup>



## Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

Tebow stated of the searches "It just goes to show you the influence and the platform that you have as a student-athlete and as a quarterback ...".[89]

WE too have influence, far more influence, far more potential than we could ever ask or imagine. We too can be fishers. We are not in the same league perhaps as Tim Tebow, but remember St Andre's favourite expression:

"It is with the smallest brushes, that the artist paints the most exquisitely beautiful pictures."

We here at St James may be a 'small brush', but together, with God's grace, we can also be contagious Christians, angels bearing God's message of Good news. Amen.

Let us pray  
Go now to smuggle God into your world,  
Holding tight the hands of those with whom you share the way:  
Youth, parents, friends, colleagues, Christ.  
May your life show God at every turn.  
Amen!

I would like to end by sharing another story about answering a call. It is about going out of our way to identify with those we encounter so they feel loved.

In 1980, eight-year-old Andy Bremner was diagnosed with cancer. Cards and letters from his friends poured in for five days – and then stopped. His mother, Linda, noticed that those letters had become a lifeline for Andy, so she decided to write. Every few days she sent him a note, signing it “Your Secret Pal.”

She didn’t think Andy suspected anything. Then one day she found her son sketching at the kitchen table. He wouldn’t let her see what he was drawing. “It’s for my secret pal,” he explained. After Andy fell asleep, Linda sneaked a peek at the picture he had drawn. She found a child’s picture and below it the words “I love you, Mommy.”

For the next four years, Linda Bremner wrote to her son. When he died in 1984, she found every letter she had written him stashed like treasure in the back of his closet, along with an address book from a camp he had attended for children with cancer. Linda wrote to every child listed in that address book. The response was enormous. “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” one child wrote back. “I didn’t know anybody knew that I lived.”

Linda wrote to terminally ill children at the hospital where Andy had been treated. Names kept pouring in and Linda enlisted help from other family members to write letters. She eventually founded “Love Letters”, a Chicago-based nonprofit organization now staffed by 65 volunteers who write 1,100 notes every week to children they have never met.

“We don’t call it ministry,” she said. “But that’s what it is. Society has taught us that touch—physical or emotional—is dangerous, and I understand the concern. But we’re out to touch people.” Her advice is to go home and write a love letter to *somebody* in your life. Something as simple as a card can change a day, or a life.”

It's not logical that God can take the death of a 12-year-old boy and use it to bring hope to more than a thousand children every week. It's not logical that God can use people who never imagined themselves ministers and to deliver 'love letters' from God, to people desperate for a touch of transformation. We do this because two thousand years ago in a stable in Bethlehem, God delivered a Love Letter addressed to us.

Let us pray

Go now to smuggle God into your world,

Holding tight the hands of those with whom you share the way:

Youth, parents, friends, colleagues, Christ.

May your life show God at every turn.

Amen!

(Those born in the 1960's and 1970's are called Generation X. They do not believe in "universal truth". What Gen X'rs understand is '**what is true for you**'. The best way to communicate '**what is true for you**' is to live it. This is not a new idea but "walking the walk" is now more important than ever.)

*“We can’t just come at people. We have to go with them.”*<sup>2</sup> “Incarnational” means **we are born** in the other person. This idea springs out of the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus communicated his great love for us by being born one of us. He lived life as one of us and so, was not spared extreme suffering. In this way he showed how very far he was willing to go to identify with us. In the same way, we can go out of our way to identify with those we encounter, whether Christian or not, so they will feel loved. There are five-steps in this approach to evangelism:<sup>3</sup>

1. Do what they do - *whatever*, it doesn’t matter! It doesn’t have to be ‘religious’.
2. Enjoy and accept them - be sincere - remember they are looking for what’s real.
3. Affirm what is good in their values - put your judgments in the garbage.
4. Share the story of Jesus in their terms - use their expressions. e.g. “high” on Jesus.
5. Invite them to follow Jesus in a way to which they can relate. For example invite them to Christian worship in a style you guess would speak to them.

Couldn’t we use these 5 steps to approach any person or persons outside our own circle of love? Spending time with such others seems to be particularly helpful. After all, that is what Jesus did. He didn’t keep himself cloistered with select friends. He talked to and ate meals, a very intimate thing, with people on the fringe, and that’s how he fished for people.

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<sup>2</sup> Ford, Kevin Graham, *Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of Xers*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 200.