

Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.

After hearing John's version last Sunday, today we read Matthew's account of the calling of the first disciples.

While we can trace the beginnings of the Christian church to the work of the apostles in the Book of Acts, each of our four Gospels holds accounts of Jesus calling together the first community who would follow him.

We are inheritors of that call. We hear the "follow me" and know that it calls us as surely as it called Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John.

Just as their encounter with Jesus along the shore changed their lives, when we encounter and listen to Christ in scripture and in the people around us, our lives are changed as well.

And just like those who traveled alongside Jesus, we too are sent to do the work of fishing for people, proclaiming good news, and curing what ails the world.

This story demonstrates an important model for us. All organizations have a primary task, their reason for being and the activity that they uniquely exist to do. The first core model taught at the College for Congregational Development outlines this for communities of faith: to Gather – Transform – Send.

The unique purpose and work of a congregation is to **gather** those called by God into Christ's body, the Church – which is a community of **transformation** of mind, heart, and action – and to **send** these same people into the world both to be and to act as God's loving and transforming presence.

In other words: follow me, listen to me, fish for people.

All churches do this work of gathering, transforming, and sending – but it looks different in every place because our contexts vary.

Sometimes we do some parts better than others. For example, there are four parts to gathering people: inviting, greeting, orienting, and incorporating. A church might be great at greeting, but not as strong at inviting people.

Or, a congregation might offer great Christian education as a source of transformation, but not be as adept at open communication, which is a part of the culture and climate of a community and also important in how people are formed.

And sometimes, churches equip people for being sent out to live their faith in their family life, but don't connect the dots to what it looks like in their work life.

All of this is to say that **gather, transform, send** gives us a model that shows us our task as a community of faith – the work we are called to do – and is also a tool to evaluate what we do well and opportunities for growth.

The disciples didn't always get it right in the Gospels, and we won't always either, but what always remains true is that Jesus calls us to follow him, and gives us ways to do that faithfully.

In a bit, during our Annual Meeting, I will share another core model from the College for Congregational Development: Sources of Transformation.

That model delves deeper into the key means through which congregations offer transformation of mind, heart, and action – again giving a way to look at our life together and help us envision where we want to grow in the coming years.

My prayer is that we all are ready to answer the call of Jesus Christ our savior and follow him into new life here at St. James’.

~ Amen ~