

Today's scripture readings were not paired together in the lectionary. After I read the calling of the disciples in Mark I read a commentary that made a remark of a strange commonality to Mark found in Ezekiel and Amos. What is that commonality? Fishing. It is very apparent in Mark and rather strange in Amos – but still it is there. To help we need to understand that we usually associate the fishing in the Gospels as being done with nets. No doubt all the fishermen Jesus called would have also been adept with using a pole, line and hook; it's just that to make a living fishing you have to harvest in quantity!

But what is the link with Amos and fishing? "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring me something to drink!'" I admit after "casting out" such a "catchy" opening "line" (fishing puns – don't you love them?) with which Amos pronounces judgment on the elite women of the northern kingdom of Samaria – the fishing link is easy to miss. But the very next line offers this rather gruesome picture. "The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: the time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks." Ouch!

Is the reference in Amos to taken literally? I have heard commentary suggesting both yes and no. Yes, in that as a way to humiliate captives large fishhooks were used to either apprehend defeated but defiant people or lead those already subjugated away. No, in that it is used metaphorically to speak to God's judgment on the rich and powerful who abuse their power, wealth and privilege to subjugate the poor and defenseless. They were unfair and cruel to the weak when they should have acted more in accordance with God's proclamations and laws.

In Mark's story Jesus calls the fishermen to follow him and become new kinds of fishermen. Instead of fish they will be catching people. Like God's word spoken by Amos the tools of a common sort will be used in uncommon ways. Unlike Amos Jesus has them put away the tools of their trade. Amos uses the fishing image as a judgment on those in the northern kingdom for those who refuse to respond to God's call to faithfulness. Mark uses the fishing image to entice followers of Jesus to become faithful and call others to faithfulness. Both carry a sense of God's intentions being carried out – for Amos it is God's awful but fair judgment and for Mark it is to cast the net of God's mercy and grace further than it has been up to this time. In both God uses others to accomplish God's will.

God's words through Amos are read with amazement and horror while in Mark the words are read with amazement and wonder. Both relate rather compelling and attention grabbing tactics. While we hope and pray never to be caught with the awful hooks in Amos we strive to be the kind of hooks that will draw people into God's presence. In either instance action is required on our part and God's intentions are understood.

When we can be faithful in our walk with God we can accomplish two things – we can avoid the fishhooks of judgment and become the fisherwomen and fishermen of compassion and justice that the first disciples were.