

I Will Make You Fishers

Mark 1:14-20
January 28, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

I rather like it when texts like this one pop up in the Lectionary. It gives me the opportunity to talk a bit about one of my passions: I like to fish. So I want to begin with a couple of general statements. We may come back to these.

First, as I said, I like to fish. There have been days—not many, mind you—but days when I did not catch many fish. Truth be told, there has even been a time or two or three when I did not catch any fish. Skunked. But I have never stopped fishing. Having a bad day did not lead me to abandon my passion for catching fish.

Second, the first men Jesus called to follow him were fishermen. We can read of a time or two when the disciples were out fishing...and they were catching nothing. Can anyone point to a time in the Gospels when Jesus happened upon the disciples and the disciples were loading the boat with fish? No. They were either mending their nets, or they were catching nothing. Jesus then told them what to do. Cast on the other side of the boat. Put out into deeper water. Jesus gave them a new technique or a new location, and they caught fish. Think about that.

I know it is sometimes difficult for some to talk openly about their faith. There are those who think it is all a private matter. But knowing Jesus is not a private thing. There are so many who need to know who we know. It is not about what we know...but who we know. We must tell them.

Just for a little fun I read a few verses from Jonah. I have always seen just a bit of irony in his story. I may be alone in this. I often see irony...and people wonder just what it is I am looking at. You see, Jonah is the story of a man who was reluctant to share the good news...the

first reluctant fisherman. Jonah received a clear call from God. God told Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh. Jonah was to call that wicked city to repentance. What did Jonah do? Instead of going to Nineveh, he went in the opposite direction. He did not go fishing for souls in Nineveh. So...he ended up becoming fish bait...swallowed by a huge fish. Had to be a big fish...big enough for a man to end up whole in its belly...a big enough fish to give any taxidermist a heart attack. Even after the fish spit Jonah out onto shore...and even after Jonah did go and preach to the people of Nineveh...Jonah still had no compassion for them.

We must have compassion for those who need Jesus. We are called to fish. Don't want to end up being fish bait.

So we read this story of the calling of the first disciples. Jesus was strolling along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He came upon Peter and Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea. They were fishermen. Jesus invited them to follow him, and he would make of them fishers for the souls of people. A little farther on down the beach Jesus happened upon James and John. They, too, were fishermen. Jesus called them. They followed.

They left at once and followed Jesus. That's impressive. But I am going to suggest that this very likely was not their first encounter with Jesus. We read about their first encounters in the Gospel of John. John the Baptist saw Jesus. He said, “Look. There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Two of John the Baptist's disciples went and spent some time with Jesus. One of those two was Andrew. He went and brought his brother Peter to Jesus. So Andrew and Peter, at least, had already spent some time with Jesus before Jesus issued the call. They followed.

Okay. So Jesus arrives on the scene. He begins his public ministry. He announces, "The time has come!" He is not talking about any chronological time here. He isn't saying something like, "Okay, it is two o'clock." No. Jesus is saying that God is on the move. God is on the move. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Repent. Believe.

Jesus begins to preach that message. His next step is to gather some folks whom he can teach...and who will then become sharers of that message. That's when he calls these guys to follow him. They are fishermen. He uses the fishing metaphor. He tells them they will fish for the souls of people.

So Jesus recruits these men to follow him and then become sharers of the good news of grace and salvation. We who follow Jesus are also sharers of the good news. We fish for people. So I would simply like to share a lesson or two or three I have learned about fishing. Maybe they apply here.

One, fishing requires a great deal of patience. This was the hardest lesson for me to learn...because, as you know, I am not the most patient person. But I will tell you the times when I am the most patient are those times when I am fishing. You know, you just don't throw a line in the water and catch a fish each time. Some days you catch many. Some days the wait can be long between bites. Patience. There are times when just being out on the water has to be its own reward. Patience.

There are all kinds of people—fish in the sea—who have had no experience of God's love and grace. There are people who have had some kind of negative experience with religion. There are others who have all those excuses for why they don't attend church or respond to the invitation to follow Jesus. You know, stuff like the church is full of hypocrites. There are people who just resist the invitation to hear the good news.

Don't ever give up. Keep offering the invitation. Keep sharing. And be patient. I have heard so many great stories of people who

resisted for so long the invitation to follow Jesus. But then they said yes. Be patient. Keep inviting.

Two, there is a right place to fish.

Take a lake...any lake. South Center. You look out at all that water. Well, there are many places in all that water where there are no fish. The angler must find the fish. Like...try Needle Point or any one of the sunken humps. There are places where the fish are. Those are the right places to fish. The most important ingredient to fishing success is not what color bait you are using...or what type of bait. The most important thing is simply finding the fish...fishing in the right place. If there are no fish where you are fishing, it doesn't matter what kind of bait you are using.

So allow me to just put it like this: we are not going to catch fish in a baptismal font. What I mean by that is we need to leave the church building and go out to where the lost and seeking souls are. Read the Gospels. Jesus did not spend a whole lot of time in the temple and the synagogues. He was in the villages and homes of everyday people. What was one chief complaint leveled against Jesus? He welcomed sinners and ate with them. That's what those religious folks said. "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." He hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes and other sinners. They were attracted to Jesus and grace.

What if folks said that about us? Those Methodists! They welcome sinners, and they eat with them. I'll tell ya what: that would be among the best things that could be said about us! We need to be out there. That is the right place...the place where the hungry are.

There is a right place to fish.

Lastly, fishing is not all luck. There is always something we can learn to up the odds in our favor.

To be sure, there are a plethora of fishing shows on the television. Whole stations devoted to it. The Outdoor Channel. The Sportsman's Network. There are plenty of magazines and books. We can learn.

When Jesus called these people, he did not say, "Follow me and start fishing." He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers...." They spent time with Jesus. They learned from Jesus. They witnessed and experienced a whole lot of grace. They witnessed Jesus showing great grace to that woman caught in adultery. They experienced Jesus washing their feet. They received extraordinary grace.

So, too, with us. Learn from Jesus. Continue to experience his grace. It is all about Jesus. Let him make us into anglers for the souls of people.

Be patient. Go to where those hungry souls are. Learn from and experience Jesus. Oh...and don't let a bad day keep us from fishing.

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."