

“Are We Merely Keepers of the Aquarium?”

Date: February 24, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 5:1-11

Occasion: Epiphany 7, Year C

Theme: Evangelism; Fishing for Disciples

This morning I want to focus our attention on *one* sentence that Jesus says to Peter: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” Today we’re going to have a fishing clinic. We’re going to talk about catching people for the Kingdom of God.

My very first district superintendent made this point, and it has stuck with me for over 30 years. I remember him telling us at one of our district meetings, “Far too many Christians think they heard Jesus say to them, ‘Be Keepers of the Aquarium.’” And that’s not what Jesus said at all. Jesus said to go and be fishers of people.”

That thought has really stuck with me over the years, because I think he was right. Far too many Christians think the task of the church is to keep the church going; institutional survival if you will. But it’s not. The task of the church is to go out into deep waters, to let the net over the side of the boat and to catch people for Jesus Christ.

In light of our General Conference taking place in St. Louis this weekend, I hope we, as well as our delegates, remember that the purpose of the church is not institutional survival, or even institutional purity. The purpose of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

So, regardless of whether you are conservative or liberal, pro-gay or pro-traditionalist, the mission of the church needs to continue. We are to be about the work that Christ has given us – making disciples for the transformation of the world.

The Gospel lesson before us is one of the biggest fish stories of all time. Not in the sense of being a fib, but rather in the truth it reveals. Peter and the boys had been casting their nets over the side of the boat, fishing all night long. They had very little luck. They returned to shore early in the morning, just in time to catch one of Jesus' sermons.

In fact, Jesus borrows Peter's boat because the crowd had grown too large and Jesus needed some space. Putting off just a few feet from shore, Jesus now had a floating stage from which to preach. After his sermon, Jesus turns his attention to the unlucky fishermen. He tells them to go out again, and commands them to put their nets over the side.

And this time it took two boats, with several men in each boat to haul in all of the fish they had caught. At that moment, Peter knew he was in the presence of someone special and holy. It was not so much a matter of believing Jesus was a better fisherman than he, but Simon Peter knew this man was from God.

Right then and there Peter drops to his knees and prays, sensing his unworthiness. But Jesus lifts him up and blesses him. An amazing thing happens to Peter. He started out that morning as a just a tired fisherman. Then, Jesus got into his boat and his life changed forever.

He cried out for Jesus to leave him, and instead found himself sanctified. Before the morning was over, Peter heard the words, "From now on you will be catching people." The command to "Go fish" has been handed down to every Christian since Peter.

It is an essential part of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Most of us are not comfortable with the word "evangelist," often associating it with the guys on TV, or the street preachers who yell at people, or maybe Billy

Graham. Perhaps we think that's the job of the professional preacher. I'd like to offer three good reasons why we should **all** go fishing in the name of Jesus.

Reason number one is gratitude. God first loved us. God sent us His beloved Son to live and die and rise again for our salvation. Peter was overwhelmed with Christ's mercy, kneeling there in the bottom of that smelly fishing boat. Peter knew what kind of life he had lived and he felt unworthy.

But Christ in His love deemed him worthy. When Peter got out of the boat that morning, he was a changed man. Out of gratitude for what Christ did for him, Peter became a fisherman for Christ. Out of gratitude for what Christ has done for us, we are called to the ministry of fishing.

Reason number two for going fishing for Jesus is found in Matthew 28:19. Jesus told us to do it. The Great Commission says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Why should you share your faith with someone else? Because, Jesus tells us to do it.

Reason number three to forsake the aquarium and to go fishing: people need to hear the good news. People need Jesus Christ. The Church is the vessel God has chosen to use to carry the message of salvation. You can go to the gym to work on your body. You can go to the Kiwanis Club if you want to do some service projects. You can belong to the PTA if you want to help kids.

But the church is the vessel which God has chosen to carry the message of salvation to the world. Faith in Jesus can bring new and everlasting life. And our world needs to hear the message. That's why we go fishing – so the world may hear and believe.

But where will we go fishing? Look around you and you will find your fishing pond. By design, God has placed people where you live, work or go to school, who need Jesus. Take a minute and think about the people who God has placed around you, people who may need to hear how much God loves them, who need to hear that there is a reason to hope. Who are they? Neighbors? Co-workers? Family members? People at school? Club members? You know somebody who needs to know that God loves them, and that God shows us His love through his son, Jesus Christ.

You could call them up and invite them to come to church. You could invite them to dinner or go visit them simply to get to know them. A very simple method for fishing is this: “Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Christ.”

And always remember that love is the bait we use for sharing Christ. You are the bait; you are God’s witness. And please don’t discount what you can do. If you’re willing to say a few words about what God has done or is doing in your life, God will use your witness in ways that you can’t imagine. But we’ve got to be willing to be used by God.

In 1972 NASA launched a space probe called “Pioneer 10.” Its main mission was to reach Jupiter and send back information about that planet. It was a bold plan, because at that time no satellite had gone beyond Mars. Well, Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and so much more.

It swung past Jupiter in November 1973. Then it passed Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. By 1977 Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun. Despite that tremendous distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to earth.

The most remarkable thing about it was those signals were powered by an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates as much power as a bedroom night

light. Not even the most optimistic scientist could have imagined what that little 8-watt transmitter could do.

And so I challenge you not to think your witness can't be used by God to make a difference in someone else's life. It's just amazing what God can do through little 8-watt transmitters like you and me, when we're turned on for him. You and I are the bait. Let's go fishing for the Lord.

I don't know what the final results will be in St. Louis. But I do know that whatever happens, Jesus has not called us to be keepers of the aquarium. Instead, he calls us to go out into the deep waters and to cast our nets for the kingdom of God. Will you go?