

God's Promise: Ministry

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Matthew 4:12-23

CHILDREN'S TIME

Have you ever been fishing? What if I invited you to go fishing? Would you go with me? Would you go with me if I told you that I have only been fishing once and that was when I was only a few years older than you? I really know only a few things about fishing. I know that you need a fishing rod, or maybe a net. And if you use a rod, you need a fishing line and some kind of hook and bait on the end of it. I also know that you need to cast the line into the water and maybe jiggle it a little bit to attract the fish. I know this not so much from fishing myself, but because I have watched other people fish, and have heard people talk about fishing.

If we wanted to go fishing, it is probably better to learn from a master fisher, someone who has been fishing for many years, like Henry. I am sure he has fished in all kinds of lakes and maybe even rivers. I bet he could tell you all about fishing — things that I could never tell you.

Henry could probably tell you about the best time of day to catch which kind of fish and the best lakes to catch them in. I'm sure that Henry could tell you about what kind of fishing rod to use and what kind of bait will catch the biggest fish. I bet he could also tell you what to do when a fish bites on your line, and how to get that fish into your boat. I could never tell you about all of those things.

You could certainly learn much more about fishing from Henry than me.

Now, if we are talking about living a life of faith in God, then we would want to talk with an expert, right? The best person I know to help us live that kind of life is Jesus. Jesus is the master of living life. To learn from Jesus, we can read stories in the Bible. We also can pray to Jesus and ask for help you live a good life. We can also learn from other people who have been living a Christian life longer than we have. That might be your parents, or grandparents, or other people in this congregation. We learn best about faith from masters.

SERMON

God promises to call us into ministry, and this work is much bigger than just for us.

Baptists often say that everybody in the church is a minister. God has given us all ministry to do as part of God's family.

So, what is ministry?

Ministry is not something only done by someone with a theology degree.

In the most simple language, ministry is the work of the people of God. It is how we live out or express our faith in the world. That could be worship leading, like Joan has done this morning in our worship service. But ministry is also making space to have a compassionate conversation with a co-worker who is struggling through the loss of a family dog.

Ministry includes doing outreach as an organized project with a group of people from the church. But ministry is also intentionally saying a prayer before meals with your family.

Ministry is singing in the choir. It is also being humble and biting your lip when accused wrongly by a neighbors about damaging their lawn, then taking the high road and continuing to treat them with respect.

Ministry is sharing your faith with a friend who doesn't have a

relationship with God. And ministry is also doing the difficult work of being ethical standard and honest about reporting your business income on your taxes when it would be easy to lie.

Ministry is allowing your faith to focus your thoughts and your actions in all aspects of your life. This begins with a simple call to follow.

Listen to Jesus calling Peter and others into a life of ministry.

READ MATTHEW 4:12-23

Entering ministry begins with a simple "yes." God's promise is to give us ministry that is important and life-giving. However, it is not a promise that the journey of ministry will be easy.

The life of ministry will challenge us, strip away the things that are less important or frivolous, cause us heart wrenching inner debates, present opportunities to clash with others and their goals.

The life of ministry also calls us deeper into the heart of life — the core of life — the good stuff of life.

Now, most of the time, easy things don't produce big rewards. But we often wish they would. You know how this goes.

We think, and maybe even say out loud things like, “Wouldn’t it be great to be offered a part-time, and flexible-hour job, that required no experience or education and that paid a \$200,000 salary? And while we’re at it, let’s make that salary non-taxable!

And wouldn’t it be great if we could have the deepest, most meaningful marriage that required no work and had no challenges?

And wouldn’t it be great if we could be the star basketball, hockey, football, or water polo player without ever practicing or working out?

But this simply isn’t the way the world works. Important things in life require work and involve working through tension or conflict.

This reminds me of what I learned in massage therapy school a couple of decades ago about what doctors do when repairing damaged tissues for people who have wounds of all sorts including burns.

Some of the methods to repair skin include shaving layers of skin from somewhere else on the body and “transplanting” it to the injured site where it attaches and grafts into the surrounding tissues.

Other methods include using an engineered matrix that the body will fill with all the cells needed in the dermis and epidermis layers of the damaged skin to repair the wound.

Another procedure is to repair a wound with new skin. It involves taking stem cells and creating skin cultures in a lab until it is large enough to be grafted onto a wound site. This is one of the more costly processes, but I find it the most interesting because of the process.

Cultured skin is very fragile and very susceptible to tearing, but researchers discovered that adding slight tension into the tissue as it is being cultured will give it the strength needed for a successful graft and the ability to handle the stresses and tasks of normal life activity.

Without applying the tension, the tissue would be weak and rip even with gentle tasks.

This principle is also true about so many areas of life including ministry. Without tension, without struggles, without the need to work at living out our faith, we would be very weak, remain shallow, and frankly be ineffective at any worthwhile ministry.

You know how this works. Think for a moment about your accomplishments — those things that have you feeling most proud of what you have done. Were any of those things handed to you without requiring any work or struggle on your part? My guess is no.

This is true for ministry. None of us want the ministry we do to be shallow and insignificant. So, this will require something of us.

Ministry is not safe. When Jesus called Peter out of his fishing boat into a life of ministry, he called him away from his family business, which was the only work he knew, and into a life without economic security. He would not have a safety net to fall back on. He didn't have the predictability of a future.

Instead, the life of ministry had Peter place his life in God's hands.

Now, while this is certainly risky, we also know, as the Psalms often remind us, that God is our strength when we are committed to ministry.

God is our protector. God is our refuge. God is the one who stands by us, with us, and for us.

It is in God's hands that we are lifted up when we are weak. We are given purpose much beyond ourselves to use the gifts God has

given us for the sake of all humanity as we find our place in God's community.

Peter was called to "fish for people" but at first he had no idea what that meant or what it would take. But he trusted that Jesus would teach him along the way. This would required him to retool his whole worldview, and struggle to re-orient his life around what this new life meant for him.

Perhaps we can expect that our call to ministry won't be any different.

When we consider Peter, we realize that God gave him only a snapshot of the big picture, but then called him to one step at a time. Even without an understanding of what was ahead, Peter said "yes" to Jesus. Then he committed himself to learn all he could to live out the ministry that Jesus gave him.

Consider for a moment where in life you are right now. What is the next step for you to take? Perhaps it is to say that initial "Yes" to follow Jesus into a life of ministry. Maybe it is to take a step toward deepening your prayer life. Maybe it is taking a step toward a better relationship with your co-workers. Maybe it is to take a step toward reading a chapter a day in your bible.

Consider what your next step in a ministry life might be. If you have no clue, then begin a conversation with a good friend who is a bit more mature in their faith, or come talk with me and we can sort it out together.

What I know is that it won't be easy, but it is perhaps the most worthwhile and transformative journey you will take, and Jesus will lead you, like Peter, one step at a time.