

## **“Drop-Everything Discipleship”**

Date: January 25, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Mark 1:14-20

Theme: Discipleship

Occasion: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

Gary Nicolosi shared this sermon illustration which I think is an insightful critique of the church today. He wrote: “I recently read an article about some pelicans in California. If you’ve ever seen pelicans in action, you know they’re great fishermen, or fisher-birds, I guess.

“These pelicans were hanging out near a fleet of fishing boats. The fishermen on the boats would pull into the little harbor and clean the fish right on the spot, throwing the heads and the rest into the water. The pelicans picked up on this and began eating the leftovers without having to go out fishing.

“If you’re a pelican, that’s good eating! So, for weeks they just sat by the harbor and waited for the fishing boats to come in. After a while, the fishermen found out they could sell the fish waste, and so they stopped chucking it into the water. The pelicans were caught unprepared.

“They continued to sit and wait for the fishing boats to come in and throw free food in the water. And they grew thinner and thinner, and seemed able to do nothing about their situation.

“Wildlife officials came to check out what was going on, and concluded that the pelicans had forgotten how to fish. So what they did was to bring pelicans in from another area to join the flock and teach the starving birds how to fish again.”

Now, what does that story have to do with the gospel lesson I just read? And, what does that have to say about the church today?

Simply this, we have forgotten that when Jesus called the first disciples, he told them he would make them fishers of men. Or, we might say “fishers of souls,” to be more inclusive. Is it possible that we have forgotten how to fish for souls?

The text in front of us this morning is a statement about radical discipleship. Leonard Sweet points out: “In these few verses, Jesus’ role as an authoritative, compelling preacher is defined; the kernel of the gospel is expressed; and *drop-everything* discipleship is described.” I love that line, *drop-everything discipleship*.

Mark uses the word “immediately,” and it captures our attention. Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James and John, and *immediately* they left their nets and followed him. They walked away from their old way of life, their old ways of doing things, their kindred and their family.

This is a radical and bold move on their part. These four fishermen seem to be taking a calculated risk by following a leader whose future is uncharted, uncertain, and unpredictable. They are giving up a familiar past for a problematic and uncertain future.

Fishing was hard work, but it was a secure career as a Galilean fisherman. Why would a person turn his back on something so secure? There appeared to be only one answer: they believed Jesus’ word to be true. They literally took him at his word when he said,

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news.” They did believe. And they dropped everything to follow Jesus. They believed Jesus’ word. They felt that what he said was true and trustworthy. And they dropped everything to follow Jesus.

There is something compelling about Jesus. It was not just that he spoke a good message. It was not just that he was a charismatic preacher. There was something different about this man. The church later put it into words by saying that Jesus and God are one and the same. Jesus has revealed God to humanity.

If you want to see and know what God is like, get to know Jesus. Jesus is God-with-skin-on. Jesus embodies God. Jesus shows us God. Our role as modern-day fishers-for-Christ is not to “get people saved,” as some denominations describe it. Our role is to introduce people to the Lord Jesus Christ and let the Holy Spirit change their hearts. Our role is to love people with the love of Jesus, and let Jesus convert them. Who wants to go fishing?

Linda Jacobus, in a sermon entitled “Forgetting How to Fish,” offers these tips for modern-day fishers of men/women. They are:

1. Go where the fish are. Be with people on their own turf.
2. Be real. Be vulnerable. Be honest.
3. Be creative. We don't have to do things the same old way.
4. Be spiritual, but not “churchy.”
5. Be patient.
6. Be ready for surprises!
7. Be willing to step out of your comfort zone.
8. Be on the lookout for where God is already at work.
9. Be praying. Pray for people. And pray for opportunities.

Jesus needs disciples who are willing to call others to be disciples. Jesus began with these four men. Notice *how* Jesus called them. He simply said, “Follow me.” It was a personal invitation of himself.

The disciples perceived Jesus' invitation as one full of power and promise. The simple fishermen respond to Jesus' call to "follow me" as though they already felt the presence and pull of the kingdom.

Notice *when* he called them. It was during a day's work while they were catching fish, hoisting sails and mending nets. The call didn't come in God's house. It came in a secular and public place, in the middle of a work-day, not inside the church, but out-of-doors.

Notice *who* he called to be his disciples. Who did Jesus choose to be on his staff? Not anyone with a seminary degree, but simple folks. They were neither college-educated nor wealthy aristocrats. They were fishermen, who were used to hard work. They had strong backs, calloused hands and wind-burned cheeks.

When God calls, people should not think so much about who they are, but about what Jesus can make of them. Not what is, but what can be. We can leave the old behind and begin again as "new creatures in Jesus Christ" because we too can take Jesus at his word. His word is trustworthy.

Notice *how the disciples responded*. Immediately they left everything and followed him. There is a sense of urgency about the gospel. Tom Seaver, the legendary baseball pitcher, once asked Yogi Berra, "What time is it?" Yogi replied, "You mean now?"

There is a sense of urgency about the gospel. When is the time to follow Jesus? Not later. Not when we get around to it. Not when we're older. Not when we have less responsibilities.

**Now** is the time to respond with drop-everything discipleship. There is a sense of urgency about the gospel that made the disciples drop everything, to follow Jesus. Have you decided to follow Jesus?

Have you decided to surrender all to Christ? Have you decided to drop everything for the sake of being a Jesus-follower?

It takes courage to live with that kind of passion for the good news of Jesus. Years ago Richard Cardinal Cushing wrote about the church's need for courage. He said:

“If all the sleeping folks will wake up, and all the lukewarm folks will fire up, and all the disgruntled folks will sweeten up, and all the discouraged folks will cheer up, and all the depressed folks will look up, and all the estranged folks will make up, and all gossiping folks will shut up, and all the dry bones will shake up, and all true soldiers will stand up, and all the church members will pray up, and if the Savior of all will be lifted up.... Then we can have the greatest renewal this world has ever known.”

*Drop-everything Discipleship.* Are you willing to follow Jesus? Listen to the invitation again. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of souls.” As it once was, the invitation is again, to drop everything to follow the Master. To lay it all down and decide to sell-out to the Savior of the world. Are you ready for drop-everything discipleship?

You see, because if we choose to follow Jesus, we are doing more than joining a church as though it were a club. To follow Jesus is a radical way of life. Many desire to be a disciple, but few will follow Him. Are you ready for drop-everything discipleship?

It is the way of Jesus. And if we drop everything, Jesus will give us opportunities to invite others to follow Him on the Way. Let us pray for the conversion of our own hearts, that we may be ready to follow Jesus. May it be so. Amen? Amen!