

WPC
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Fishing With Jesus
Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23

I love spending time in God's beautiful creation. This past summer, I had an opportunity to bring my family to Yosemite National Park for the first time and show them the grandeur of Half Dome and El Capitan, gigantic granite mountains that you have to see to believe. We saw the epic Yosemite falls, the impressive giant sequoia trees, and drove up to Grizzly Peak, which overlooks the whole Yosemite valley. We had a spectacular time.

I love the outdoors, but I'm far from an outdoorsman. While we enjoyed our days touring Yosemite, we spent our nights at a hotel. My love of nature doesn't extend to camping in it. My idea of roughing it is staying at the Holiday Inn instead of the Hilton.

And I don't hunt or fish. I love to eat fish, but the idea of getting up at dawn, putting a slimy worm on a hook, waiting all day to catch a fish, and then cleaning it is not my idea of a good time. I know lots of people love to fish, but it's not for me. So when Jesus tells Simon and Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people," I don't connect with what he's

saying right away because I'm not a fisherman. So I did a little reading this week on fishing, particularly fly fishing.

I never realized how much preparation and planning goes into trying to outsmart a trout with a brain the size of a pea. In order to have a successful day of catching fish, “one must be cognizant of the temperature of air and water and the specifics of entomology (you have got to ‘match the hatch,’ using flies that resemble the insects that are hatching at that moment). Then there’s the weight of the line, the length and weight and flexibility of the rod,”¹ and so on.

Notice that you can't sit at home in your living room and just think about catching fish and catch any fish. You have to go where the fish live; they won't come to you. There's even strategy involved. Fishing guides often say, “A fish is not caught that is not sought.” You must decide what sort of fish you want to catch and then you must think about which lure is appropriate at that particular time of the day for that particular fish.

In today's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry by calling a group of ordinary people to be his disciples. Jesus doesn't teach them correct doctrine or how to overthrow the powers. He tells these fishermen that he'll

¹ William Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, Jan. 23, 2011, p. 18.

teach them to be “fishers of men,” as our older translations put it. Follow him, and he’ll teach them to fish for people.

Fishing for people. I’m not sure that’s the most pleasant metaphor for the life of discipleship. As I said, I love to eat fish as much as anyone. But I’ve yet to meet a fish that loved being caught and filleted for my supper. Fishing for people. Anna Carter Florence says it’s a good thing that every metaphor contains an “is” and an “is not.” “Images are supposed to spark our imaginations, not chain them fast. So it would be a mistake to push the “fishing for people” metaphor too far (‘What bait shall we use this time?! What are your youth biting on?!’). We don’t hook and land unwitting and unwilling congregants. I doubt Jesus had any such thing in mind when he called out to Peter and Andrew by the Sea of Galilee.”²

On the other hand, he was starting a conversation with fishermen. Fishing was what they knew and did best. And Jesus begins right there: not with what he knows, but with what they know. “Follow me, you fishermen, and I’ll make you fish-for-men!”

What a brilliant stroke: Jesus’ call to each of us begins not with what he knows, but with what we know. It begins not with what he does best, but

² Anna Carter Florence, GoodPreacher.com, Matthew 4:12-23

with what we do best. Jesus meets us where we are before bringing us to where he is.

“Follow me, you fishing-people, and I will make you fish-for-people! Amazing, isn’t it? Before we hear a word about what’s involved in this following, he reassures us that we can do it, because it is not so different from what we have already done. In fact, we already have several of the job skills involved. We just have to adapt what we know.”³

What other calls might Jesus have extended? Anna Carter Florence has some suggestions:

Follow me, you miners, and I will make you mine for people!

Follow me, you farmers, and I will make you farm for people!

Follow me, you builders, and I will make you builders of God’s house!

Follow me, you shopkeepers, and I will make you keepers of God’s shop!

Follow me, you clowns and fools, and I will make you fools for God!

Follow me, you landscape workers, and I will make you landscapers of life!

³ Anna Carter Florence, GoodPreacher.com, Matthew 4:12-23.

Follow me, you seamstresses and tailors, and I will make you sew our lives as well as our garments!

Follow me, you cooks and chefs and butchers and bakers, and I will make you season and leaven and serve and preserve more than food!

Follow me, you insurance agents, and I will make you insure God's agency!

Follow me, you instrumentalists, and I will make you instrumental to others!

Follow me, you friends, you parents, you children, you siblings, you neighbors, you strangers, you hosts and guests, and I will make you all these things—to every other human being!⁴

It's not as hard as you might think. Christ always starts where we already are.

But we need to take action. We need to actually follow Jesus and not just listen to his words of invitation. We need to ask people to come and see Jesus for themselves. If we don't ask, it's not likely that we'll catch any people.

⁴ Anna Carter Florence, GoodPreacher.com, Matthew 4:12-23.

Fortunately, for the most part, people like to be asked, as long as it's done respectfully and with integrity. Richard E. Zajac tells a story of the late Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, who once told of a valuable lesson he learned early in his career. In 1935, during his very first political campaign, a neighbor told him: "I am going to vote for you tomorrow even though you didn't ask me to!" A shocked O'Neill replied: "Why, Mrs. O'Brien, I have lived across from you for eighteen years, I cut your grass in the summer, I shoveled your walk in the winter, I didn't think I had to ask for your vote." Mrs. O'Brien replied: "Tom, let me tell you something: people like to be asked!"⁵

In the Gospel today, Peter, James, and John were asked by Jesus to take on the work of discipleship. Zajac notes that "asking gave the three of them a life that they would have never realized or experienced had they not been asked. It opened for them a door to an unbelievable adventure they would never regret. As Mrs. O'Brien pointed out to Tip O'Neill, people like to be asked. That's not only because it gives the sense that they're important and needed and wanted but also because it gets them to consider an option

⁵ Richard E. Zajac, From Pulpit to Pew, Jan. 23, 2011.

which would otherwise not be considered, an option that could open for them a door to experiences they will cherish and love and never regret.”⁶

Jesus meets us where we are, asks that we follow him, and lets us know that he will help us every step of the way.

Take a deep breath...and follow.

⁶ Richard E. Zajac, From Pulpit to Pew, Jan. 23, 2011.