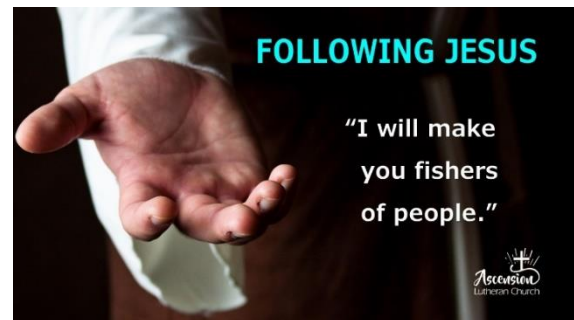


NOT JUST ANY FISHING TRIP

I was fishing last week.

- For years, Pastor Lori and I have each done individual spiritual retreats about this time each summer.
- Lori goes on a solo silent retreat at a Jesuit Retreat center for extended prayer, contemplation, and spiritual renewal.
- I do my spiritual retreat in the form of a solo wilderness canoe trip, into the Boundary Waters or the Canadian Quetico.
- I fish early, paddle back to camp (fresh walleye makes a good breakfast), and then I spend the rest of each morning sitting along the lake shore - praying, studying, and reflecting until it gets close to lunch. It renews my soul and pastoral energy for the ministry year ahead.
- I also like the fishing. A highlight last week was when I 50 inches of 3 walleye on one leech - a 15", a 16", and a 19 ½", all using the same leech.
- But that's nothing compared to the story that we heard read earlier about fishing with Jesus. "So many fish, the boats began to sink." Now that's good fishing!



Today's Bible story really isn't about catching fish, is it? It's about catching people.

- And it starts with us, we're the ones who need to be caught first before we join in the fishing for others.
- Sure, today's reading ends up being about the evangelism of telling others about Jesus, but before you're ready to do that, you need to get in touch with your own faith story.

So a couple of questions:

- *Why would you say it's a good thing to be caught by the gospel of Jesus Christ?*
- *If you belong to Jesus, what blessings and benefits has it brought you in your life?*

For a number of Sundays this summer, we've been following Jesus in the first chapters of Luke, the early days when Jesus was just beginning his three years of public ministry.

- Up to this point, Jesus was doing his ministry alone.
- But now Jesus starts inviting others to follow him, to be his disciples, to join in the ministry, to live out the Kingdom of God in the here and now, and also to reach out to invite others to join them in this following of Jesus and living out God's Kingdom together.

Luke 5 is a fishing story, but the important ones who are caught first are the two sets of brothers, Peter & Andrew, James and John. To be caught by the gospel is a joy, to be caught up in this profound belonging in the life-giving community of those who follow Jesus.

The scene opens with Jesus, this new young rabbi, teaching alongside the lake of Gennesaret, a local alternative name for the Sea of Galilee.

- Up to this point in Luke, Jesus has been teaching in the synagogues, like rabbis normally did. But now he begins to break away from being confined to the synagogues and starts preaching out in the open air.
- And the crowds love it – those excluded from the synagogue could also hear his preaching.
- He is such a popular speaker it says that “the crowds were pressing in on him” to hear him. Remember, this was before the days of microphones and sound systems.

At the lakeshore, the crowds are pressing him against the water, he sees some fishing boats, he knows the guys who own them, in the last chapter he had been hanging out at Peter’s house and had healed Peter’s mother-in-law, he says, “Peter, let’s get in your boat.”

- They anchor just a little off from shore, the boat becomes his pulpit, the crowd can spread out along the shoreline and still see and hear him.
- It says he sits down in the boat to teach them. Why include that detail? Because that’s the way of a rabbi, they sit when they preach.

When Jesus is done teaching, he says to the guys, “Let’s go fishing.” What he really says is this, *“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”*

- I hear those words as spiritual poetry.
- What is “deep water” for you, nurturing deep water for the deep parts of your soul?
- Is your life lived too much on the hurried and pressed, bustling but shallow shoreline, and too little in the “deep water”?
- Do you ever put out to “deep water”? Isn’t it time for you to let down the nets of worship, prayer, and spiritual retreat in the deep water and see what the Lord has in store for you?
- If your own faith is not in a place where you would feel comfortable sharing about it with others, maybe you need to spend more time in the deep water yourself first.
- But the deep water is where we also catch others when we do begin fishing with Jesus.

Back in the story, the boats almost sink with how many fish they catch. But the story is not actually about the fish. It’s really about the greater fishing of people that Jesus calls us to. In fact, they leave the fish behind. The story concludes, *“When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”*

- The boats and fish weren’t actually abandoned as others in the family business took care of them. But the call of Jesus had reordered the priorities of the disciples. (Do you think Jesus is calling you to reordered any of your priorities?)
- They leave their old life to follow Jesus into a new one. (Are there some old life things you also need to leave behind?)

Those disciple all became effective fishers of people, just as Jesus had promised. The proof is that we ourselves are here today. The faith didn’t start with us; we, too, descend from those who were eventually caught in the great net of evangelism fishing that began that one day, oh, so long ago.

Let’s go fishing! Amen.