

Five Invitations from Jesus: Let's Go Fishing Sunday, 5/26/19

1 We're continuing today to learn about the invitations of Jesus. Jesus was a master of giving invitations that were personal and life-changing. Let's see if we deepen our commitment to saying "yes" to those invitations, as well as learning from Jesus how to become better at inviting others. With summer vacations looming large on the horizon, let's consider today the invitation from Jesus to go fishing.

2 Although it's been many years since I last put a line in the water in an earnest attempt to catch a fish, fishing was a part of growing up in Minnesota, both for me and for my kids. That's my son on the right, and me on the left. My trophy in this picture was only about three pounds, but it seemed enormous to me at that age. I remember many fishing outings with my dad: renting a motorboat on Medicine Lake; Walleye fishing on Lake Millac with Lindy Rigs; and one really big trip to the Lake of the Woods with my dad and brother and a whole troop of other kids from the Indian Guides program. My kids did most of their fishing from the dock or on the pontoon boat at my dad's cabin in Wisconsin on Birch Island Lake. We were never hard core fishing enthusiasts. Catching fish was fun, but mostly it was just exciting to be outside on an adventure that got us out of our routines.

3 While we relied on rods and reels with daredevil lures, hula-poppers, jigs and spinners, bobbers and corn, and worms and leeches for our fishing fun, most of the fishing done when Jesus walked the earth was done commercially and with nets. All of my fishing expeditions we're in the daylight hours, while most of the fishing done by Peter, Andrew, James, and John was done at night, when the wind on the lake was less severe and the fish had a harder time seeing the lines of the net. Some of the fishing was done with cast nets as you see in this picture, but in the accounts we heard this morning, the disciples were using nets that were let down from the boat, sometime coordinated with other boats to drive the fish into the nets. While most of my fishing has been for Walleye, Northern, Bass, and Crappies, the disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee were fishing for Tilapia, Carp, and Catfish.¹ I'm not sure if there were fishing limits back then, but in contrast to the small sizes of our modern catches, Peter's boat could have handled about a thousand pounds of fish!

¹ <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/arts-and-faith/culinary-arts/biblical-fishing-101-reeling-in-the-first-fishers-of-faith>

Fish was the main source of protein, and it was dried, salted, pickled, and even made into a fish sauce that was used with other foods.

4 So why did Jesus tell his disciples that he would make them fishers of people? There are so many wrong ways to press that analogy- for example, Jesus never intended that we treat people as trophies of conquest, but let's live with the analogy for a bit and ask some questions of it. Let's see just how far we can press it.

Does becoming fishers of people mean that the world is full of people who don't know Jesus, just like the waters of the world are full of fish? We know that Jesus had the lost very much on his mind, and by "lost" I believe Jesus meant anyone who hasn't met and decided to follow Jesus. To be fishers of people then implies first an awareness that there's a whole reality to life underwater that we usually can't see until we get up close and personal to it. Sometimes we might see a fish jump out of the water. Sometimes the water is clear enough that we can see fish swimming underwater. But for the most part, we can't see the fish, and the only way we're going to meet the fish is by getting up, going to the water, and dropping our nets. By the way, this was all before the advent of fish finding sonar, which I think kind of takes away some of the faith required to fish!

5 Does fishing for people mean that sharing Jesus with others is something we need to do together? Absolutely. Peter's boat probably had a crew of at least five² with different assignments on the boat, just as not everyone in the church has the same job, gift, or talent. Those in the boat had to be strong enough to row and haul in the net, or wise enough to supervise the effort. There were women who stayed behind who had to patiently wait for them and prepare to serve them when they returned to shore. Where did we ever get the peculiar idea that sharing Jesus was something we have to do solo? Where did we get the idea that everyone has to play the same part in the sharing? That's certainly not the way fishing worked for Peter and Andrew, and it's not the way the Bible talks about the church. The church is the Body of Christ, with each of us playing unique parts. Fishing for people requires that every part of the body be present, alert, and active, but it doesn't require that everyone drops a net.

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6 Is fishing for people something we do primarily at church? Probably not. Every now and then someone tells a crazy story about a fish jumping into their boat. But even those lucky few first got into a boat and went out onto the water. Jesus did go to the Temple and the synagogues, but he didn't hang out there and wait for the disciples to come to him. He met them where they worked, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, or for Matthew, at his tax booth. John Wesley did the same thing, preaching and teaching to factory workers over their lunch breaks. The whole Methodist movement was launched because John Wesley understood that the fishing is much, much better at the lakeshore than in the pews.

7 Does fishing for people mean that, with the power of God's Word and the overwhelming presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we'll haul in a huge catch of fish every time we go fishing? I'm afraid not. Sometimes the net will be empty. As we discussed last week, there were many times when even Jesus came up empty handed, with would-be disciples turning away from following him. The Gospel is only good news to those who choose to accept the invitation, and the only one who knows for sure who's made that RSVP is Jesus. What might look like an empty net to us today might result in a great catch for another fisher of people years later. God does care that we make new disciples of Jesus, but we're not the one who determine the size of the catch. That's up to the Holy Spirit and the hearts God is speaking to.

8 Does fishing for people mean that we have to spear them with the sharp end of the Gospel, or set a barbed hook so they don't get away with the bait? Hardly, and yet sometimes we think of evangelism as something violent that we do to someone else, like fishing by throwing dynamite in the lake, going for maximum yield by any means. That's not the way Jesus did it. Jesus offered invitations to relationship. Yes, Jesus was clear and forceful when the occasion called for it, but his modus operandi was invitation, not forced conscription. We don't want to be spear-fishers of people for Jesus, so what might that look like? How can we be intentional and invitational without feeling like we're trying to be or do something that we're just not wired for?

9 Let's go back to where we started, with the Early Word message. In the church we are, by faith, children of God, no matter what our chronological age. The most basic things we need to fish for people are right here in the sanctuary today- people who love Jesus,

people like you and me; and the Bible, the first and best way for us to learn what Jesus wants us to know about himself and the world he created for us to live in. Just like fishing for fish, there are many different ways and places we might go fishing for people, but usually the best plan is to go to the places we're already going where we know there will be other people.

Show people the same kind of love that Jesus has for you, that's really the only kind of bait that fish will go for, because they can smell something artificial a nautical mile away. If you get the chance, tell people that the love you're showing them is because of the love Jesus has for you. Sometimes you'll have that chance right away, sometimes it's only after you've formed a relationship over time. But words do matter. Jesus never intended that we remain secret agents, doing random acts of kindness. We are fishers of people, offering kindness as invitations to a fuller and deeper discipleship with Jesus.

10 Very few of us would self-identify as an evangelist. But every one of us is fishing for something. Some of us are fishing for companions, because we were made in God's image, with a need to be in community with other people. Some of us are fishing for control, because it's the one thing we can't seem to get ahold of in this life. Some of us are fishing for excitement, because we're stuck in a rut and tired of the routine. We're probably all fishing for different things, but we are all fishing for something.

What are you fishing for? You're probably fishing for those things that your heart is most longing for. Jesus not only wants us to go fishing for people, he wants us to share the same longing he has for the lost. I'm guessing Jesus has always known that unless we let our hearts break for those who don't know the joy of following Jesus, we're not too likely to get up out of our chairs and into a boat. There are as many ways to do that as there are people who call themselves Christians. So how about it? Are you ready to go? Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart this morning, and he has an invitation for you: "Let's go fishing!"



Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com