

## Going Fishing: Fishing for People Sunday, 6/25/17

**1** How's the fishing been this year? Have the fish been biting? Have you been finding them where you've been looking for them? Do you have a fishing story to tell, either a recent one or one from the past that you just love to remember? Who wants to share one right now? {Pick someone to come up and give a 1-minute or less fishing story}

We continue our worship series this morning with "Fishing for People." For such a simple metaphor, it carries with it an amazing amount of baggage. So much, in fact, that increasingly people are uncomfortable with the image. Why? Just take a look at this image. For one thing, fishing for people seems so patronizing, as if we, as the ones doing the fishing from the boat, are somehow better than the ones we're saving- the ones in the water. The truth is that we are all of us, in some way or another, bobbing up and down in the water, needing to be saved.

Sometimes, the idea of fishing for people seems deceitful, especially when we adopt the image of fishing with bait or a lure, as if we need to trick people into a life with Christ, and then jerk the line, set the hook, and reel them in. Nobody wants to think of themselves as manipulators of others, and I'm certain that's not what Jesus had in mind.

So what did Jesus intend with his fishing metaphor? What and how does Jesus want us to be fishers of People? In order to understand the "what" and the "how," we have to first start with the "why." Here's one take on the "why" from the Apostle Paul. I'm reading from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 5, beginning with verse 13.

**{Read 2Corinthians 5:13-21, NLT}.**

**2** Raise your hand if you like to eat cookies! On Monday, I made seven dozen of these sour cream cookies with browned butter frosting, one of my very favorite childhood cookies. I had never made them before, but with some coaching from my mom and my daughter, I succeeded. They're difficult cookies to make, but they also melt in your mouth- so much so that I can never eat just one. The dough has sour cream in it and is sticky and difficult to work with, more like cake batter than cookie dough. The frosting is made by melting butter in a frying pan and simmering the butter until it suddenly changes color from yellow to brown, pouring the molten butter into a food processor filled with powdered sugar, and then blending it all together. It's very easy to burn the butter, burn the cookies, or make the

frosting the wrong consistency. But by God's grace I did everything right and wound up with seven dozen of my favorite cookie.

On Tuesday, I brought 5 dozen of them to share with my closest five dozen friends at the Minnesota Annual Conference gathering in St. Cloud. I spent the first two hours before the start of the conference sharing the cookies with friends and strangers, extolling their quality, describing how hard they were to make, and then telling them that I made these cookies just for them. After an hour of this, people were seeking me out, asking for a cookie! Even the Bishop got a cookie.

That's a little bit of the "how" and the "what." Now here's the "why." I made and shared these cookies because I was sold-out convinced that nobody could taste one of these cookies and not want another one. I shared them because I knew that a thousand people would be milling around the conference center with a cup of coffee in one hand and no cookies anywhere in sight. I couldn't feed them all, but there were five dozen of them that were glad I was there! I shared these cookies because I couldn't wait to share the joy I found in them with others.

After the frenzy of the great cookie sharing was over, and my Tupperware containers were empty, I began to wonder: What might happen if I invested the same amount of energy and conviction in sharing Jesus with others that I had devoted to those cookies? What might happen if we, church, individually and collectively, became so convinced that we had found something so wonderful and joy-inspiring that we enthusiastically rolled up our sleeves and set to work, preparing the most mouth-watering work of God's grace for someone else that we didn't mind the extra effort? What might happen if we couldn't wait to meet up with someone else, even a stranger, to share not only our Gospel cookies, but all the stories that go along with them? I think that's what Jesus meant when he said that we will be fishers of people.

**3** This obviously is not what Jesus meant by fishing for people. Our mission as Jesus followers isn't to condemn people, but to offer them new life! Paul writes to the Corinthians, "[W]e have all died to our old life...[Christ] died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them." (2Corinthians 5:14-15) The message of Jesus Christ isn't condemnation,

hell, or death; it's life! Too often we in the church mistakenly think that we should go fishing with dynamite, trying to blast people out of the water with the strong warnings about sin and hell that are indeed found in the Holy Scriptures. But Paul disabuses of that idea when he insists, "So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view." (2Corinthians 5:16) Friends, we in the church have got to stop evaluating others and get busy sharing the good news!

I mentioned recently that I had a new book: *The Twelve Degrees of Silence*. I've been on a journey this month of learning just how much in need I am of more silence in my life in the area of judgment. Daily, I catch myself forming little judgments: "I wonder why the neighbor's lawn is dying; That man is an idiot be riding a motorcycle without a helmet; Sure, just flick your cigarette butt out the window without bothering to consider where it'll land." Have you been there? Are you there now? Sometimes I even enlist others in my judgment, inviting them into a litany of gossip and complaint about the moral failings of the world, my neighbor, or even a passerby of whom I know absolutely nothing. The little judgments that we pronounce on others, those spoken and unspoken, are as ugly as these signs. When we judge others, we essentially scare away all the fish, and perhaps like fishing with dynamite, even cause some of them to float up to the surface, belly-up. Becoming fishers of people requires first that we see other people through the eyes of our savior- lost, hurting sheep who need a shepherd. Becoming fishers of people requires that we see ourselves through those same eyes- lost, hurting sheep who need a shepherd.

**4** One of the cool things about net fishing is that even though you might be trying to catch a particular type of fish, you're almost certain to catch other kinds of fish as well. This is closer to the kind of fishing Jesus calls us to. I see at least two implications from this type of fishing for people. When we go out onto the waters of our lives with the net of the Gospel, we're almost certainly going to find that we encounter strange fish, people who don't talk like us, look like us, or even think like us. In the waters of our mission field, Jesus has posted a strict prohibition against spear fishing, selectively sharing the Good News of Jesus with only the fish that seem like the ones we want to bring home with us. The Gospel is for all people, especially the ones who don't fit into our current categories of the acceptable or rich or powerful or beautiful or talented or even healthy. When we cast out the

Gospel net, we don't get to pick and choose, throwing the ones we don't want back into the water.

Maybe you feel like one of those less acceptable kinds of fish today: one of the bottom feeders that nobody wants around; one of the small fish that doesn't appear to be good enough or old enough; one of the bony fish that people throw back because they don't want to be bothered by your unpleasant life circumstances. If that's you today, then I want you to listen carefully. The Good News of Jesus Christ is for you. God loves you more deeply than the deepest ocean. And God is calling to you today, asking you to come home, to return to God's presence.

Maybe you recognize in your life the tendency to be too selective in who you share grace with. If that's you, then you need to set down your spear gun and pick up the Gospel net, casting a broader net of love to the people in this world. The Good News of Jesus Christ is for them as well as for you.

**5** Being fishers of people isn't always like Valentine's Day. It can be hard work and it can even be painful work. That's because although God is love, love is not God. In other words, the love of Jesus is different than the world's cheap notions of love. The love of Jesus involves reconciliation with God, which is why Jesus started his earthly ministry with a call to repentance- turning away from sin and turning toward God. Love is the most defining feature of God's incarnation in Jesus, but that love is much bigger than we can fully appreciate.

Isn't this one of the hardest things about our job as fishers of people? Jesus calls us to be bearers of the Good News, but the Good News is primarily about reconciliation, something that never comes for free. To reconcile means to bring two or more parties back together that used to be united but are now separated. There can be no Good News, no reconciliation, without an acknowledgement that once we were right with God but now our sin separates us from God and from one another. The Good News is that God has done God's part in the life and sacrifice of Jesus. We get to receive and share the news that Jesus is waiting to welcome us home with open arms. The harder news for us to share and accept is that our part in the reconciliation, turning around and coming home, can be hard work. It often requires us to leave something behind that we've become rather comfortable with in

order to walk on God's holy ground. Reconciliation is hard work and really isn't as simple as walking up to someone and handing them a button that says "Jesus is love."

**6** If fishing for people is so hard, then who can do it? All of us can. And I think that just like the sour cream cookies, the most important starting place is not the what and how, but the why. What's your "why" for fishing for people, for being light and salt in the world? What's your "why" for serving on a ministry team? For me it's because I can't imagine a reason for getting up in the morning without the love and Spirit of Jesus to lift me, guide me, correct me, inspire me, and comfort me, and I know that many don't know that Spirit. It's because I believe, like Blaise Pascal, that we all have a God-sized hole in our hearts that can only be filled with the love of God. It's because when we fill that hole with anything other than God, there's no room left for the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. It's because I care more about Jesus than even a hundred dozen sour-cream cookies with browned butter frosting, and I want to share that joy with everyone I meet.

As we get to know the "why" of being fishers of people, then I believe that God's unlimited imagination and power will blow through our lives and this church and we will discover new ways of being the church that we never would have found on our own. Do you want that, church? Do you want to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in this church and in this world? I want that too! Let's resolve to do our part to join God in this work. Let's start with the why. What's your why for sharing the Good News? What's your excuse for not sharing the good news? And what are you going to do this very day to cast your Gospel net into the waters of grace and mercy that Jesus has called us to sail.

Please pray with me. *God of the Gospel net, thank you for drawing us in, close to your heart. Empty our hearts of all the dead idols and addictions, replacing them with your burning Spirit of love, so that your Holy Spirit might spread the love of Jesus like wildfire through this world. Amen.*



# *Buffalo United Methodist Church*



*...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!*

**609 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Buffalo, MN 55313  
763-682-3538**

**Bill Reinhart, Pastor**  
*pastorbill@buffaloumc.com*