

Going Fishing
Jonah 3:1-5, Mark 11:14-20

Going fishing. To get ready for this sermon, I went into my tackle box to think about the variety of lures that are there. Fishermen love to look over their gear on a rainy day.

Here is a tiny, dry fly for trout fishing. It weighs less than a postage stamp. You tie it to a line that is thin as a human hair. When you cast it, (if you do it right) it drifts down to the surface of the stream, and just kisses the water.

Here is a plastic worm. This fellow is tough. He goes deep, slinks around the rocks and branches. He goes right down to where the fish are hiding.

Now this one is a Rapala. It is a Swedish designed swimming minnow. I have used this one so much that it has teeth marks on it. It is a flashy lure. It lands on the surface, splashes around, it dares the fish to come up and see what is happening.

There are all kinds of lures, and all with the same purpose: to catch a fish and bring it into the boat.

The Bible tells the story of God as someone who goes fishing; who goes looking for people. This God sends the Messiah with a fishing license and a net and a map of Galilee; maybe of the streets of Jerusalem. This Messiah goes around pulling people in with his net; pulling them into what he calls the Kingdom of God. "Turn and trust, for the kingdom of God is near at hand". It is his intention to haul in the least, the last, the lost; to pull into the boat folk who have sunk to the bottom, as well as those who are floating along, aimlessly or maliciously on top.

This is how Mark tells this story. Jesus shows up at John's baptism, goes into the water, comes out and is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days. There he gets his marching orders for the fishing trip. As soon as he returns, he goes about Galilee casting his net; calling people by name to come and follow him. He interrupts their work, their schedule, their plans. He yanks them out of the shallows of their lives and into the depths of God's love.

Simon and Andrew, James and John, they did not get up that morning with a to do list that said "Eat breakfast, take vitamins, fix the leak in the boat, follow the messiah." Jesus is trolling for them, and reels them in to his purposes and God's plans.

God has worked that way for a long, long time. There is another great fish story in the Bible. It is found in Jonah. Jonah was a fellow minding his own business when God spoke to him saying "Go to Nineveh, that great and wicked city, and preach to them." For Jonah, Nineveh was about the worst place on earth; not only full of Gentiles instead of good, kosher Jews; it was the dreaded capital of Babylon, which had made war on his people. No way, Jose, was he going there.

He gets on a boat going the opposite direction. He runs from God and God's assignment. There is a storm, Jonah gets tossed overboard, a fish catches Jonah, and delivers him back in God's

direction. And this time Jonah, having been caught by God's purpose, went to preach to his enemies.

Last weekend we as a nation honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King was sent to preach not only to his own people, but to his enemies as well. He constantly reminded his people that it was not the destruction of the opponents, but the conversion of others that he sought. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. King was called to preach the gospel of God's love in the face of segregation and violence. This was not the path he set out on as a young, Baptist minister.

God has caught people up in his net and sent them in a lot of strange directions.

The story of Jesus of Nazareth, before chapter one is over, tells of Jesus interrupting the lives of people to put them on a new road, to give them a new task. Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.

You and I are here today because someone dragged the net of God's love over us. Someone showed us life is more than attending to our own gear, our own boat, our own path. Who was it? Who was it who showed you something about God's love, about forgiveness, about serving a purpose larger than simply your own life or goals? Who helped you see the love of Jesus for you?

Can you picture one of the fishers who helped you get caught up in God's net? Maybe a coach or a teacher, maybe a youth director or a person who lived on your street. Maybe it was a grandparent who read you Bible stories, who said prayers with you at night and called you "precious".

Maybe it was a youth director who put up with your adolescent foolishness, who listened to your questions and struggles as though they really mattered; which they did to you.

A couple of years ago two of our teenagers preached on youth Sunday. We asked them to reflect on growing up in this congregation. The very telling thing that I noticed (and very humbling) was that they did not mention a single clergy person. They talked about you: their Sunday School teachers, youth advisors, choir parents. They talked about you as the ones who had showed them something about the love and acceptance of Christ.

Who was it for you? Maybe it was a college professor or a teacher along the way who challenged you to get over yourself and discover something much greater than just having a good time or getting by on as little work as possible.

Someone along the way showed you the net of God's love, God's call, God's purpose. That is why you and I are here today. We got caught in something much larger, much grander, much more meaningful than our own small to do list.

If that is not true, if you really are not sure why you bother to come here, or what all these folk are talking and singing about, then we would like very much to talk with you about it. We very much want you to know why God bothered to send the fisherman Jesus to find us and us into the boat.

I heard a new presentation of the central message of the Gospel this week. A fellow said ‘When you get to the end of your life, and come to stand before God – God will have one question for you, and only one. That question will be “Do you know how much I love you?” It will not be about mistakes we have made, sin we have committed, or even a list of good deeds. There is only one question “Do you know how much God loves you?”

If you do not, we would like to help you find out.

And if you do know, then it is now our turn to join the company of fishers of people. Jesus says “Follow me. I will make you fishers of people.” Not because we are good, but because God is good. Not because we have some great plan for how to fix all those folk or how to fix the world. That is not up to us.

In this fishing operation we do not even have to reel them in. We cast the net, but Jesus draws it to the boat. Jesus has a lot of different lures in his tackle box.

You may be like this tiny, dry fly. Your witness may be gentle and quiet. Maybe you are that person who can look someone else in the eye and truly see them; truly ask them “how are you doing? May I pray for you?”

Or you may be made of tougher stuff like this plastic worm. Maybe you are willing to go into some dark places, some out of the way places to find those who need to see something of God’s love in person.

Maybe you are flashy like this swimming minnow. Maybe you are glad to be the one to bring up the topic of faith in Christ, and seek to draw others to the conversation.

There are a lot of different ways to go fishing. Techniques are different, but the goal is the same. We are to show the love of God for all people; to offer the forgiveness of Jesus; to build up the work of justice for the poor and forgotten; to embody mercy for people who may have not seen it in person. We are to help drag the net of God’s love over those we meet.

You are the lures in the tackle box of Jesus. We are his fishing gear, the crew in his boat.

Charlie Summers

The reflection question: where might you “go fishing” this week with the love of Christ?