

Mark 1:14-20

I've seen guys wearing t-shirts that read, "I'd rather be fishing," but I've never seen a fisherman wearing a shirt that read, "I'd rather be in church." Today everyone should be happy. We're in church and the sermon is about fishing.

Simon and Andrew, James and John knew how to fish. They made a living from it. And so when Jesus called them to be fishers of men, they had an idea of what it would take. It would take patience. It would take dedication. It would be hard work. And it would be rewarding work. These four disciples did not hesitate when Jesus called them. They did not reply, "Give me a week to think about it." They did not say, "Let me first finish my work here and then I'll come follow you." All four left their nets and boats immediately when Jesus called.

So why do we hesitate today? Why do we procrastinate when it comes to inviting our un-churched friend to come with us on Sunday morning? Why do we offer up a list of excuses for not serving in the church? God's timing is never convenient. Right as Simon and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea is when Jesus called to them. James and John were hard at work mending their nets when He called them. If we today are waiting for the right time to respond to God's invitation, that time will never come. The day will never come when all our work here is done and we finally have the time to serve God. The day will never come when our doubts and fears about inviting our friend to church with us will cease to exist.

When the fish are running off the coast of Alaska, the fishermen do not say, "I'm too tired now. I'll head out in my boat tomorrow." They drop everything and go to work. And that is God's timing for us. He does not wait until you and I are ready. When the fish are ready, that is when He calls us to action. And the first course of action is to follow Jesus. "Follow Me," He told Simon and Andrew, "And I will make you fishers of men." No one can be a fisher of men unless he is following Jesus. But all who follow Jesus are called to be fishers of men.

Simon and Andrew, James and John would have understood it this way...to be a fisherman, you have to be in a boat. The fish were out in the deep water. To get at them you had to get into the boat. The boat is Jesus' church. The baptized who regularly, in faith, come to hear the words of Christ and receive His body and blood in the Sacrament--these are Jesus' followers. These are the ones who are in the boat.

And Jesus' boat is no cruise ship. It's a fishing boat. On a fishing boat everyone works. There are many and various tasks to do, and not everyone does the same task, but everyone on the boat works in some way. And so in Jesus' boat--here in the church there are many ways to serve. And not all of us do the same task, but everyone works, everyone serves.

It's automatic. When one follows Jesus, that one will serve. If you are regularly hearing Jesus' words; if you are always coming up for His Sacrament, Jesus will be at work in you and through you. The best givers in any congregation are not those with the most money, but those who love to follow Jesus. The best workers are not those who have the most time on their hands, but those who love to follow Jesus. "Follow Me," says Jesus. That must come first to be a giver, a server, a fisher of men.

So, my fellow fishers of men, how's fishing? Don't lie. Be honest. It's frustrating, isn't it? The work, at times, can seem pointless. "Why do I never seem to get results?" We follow, we work, we serve...where is the reward for all this effort? "I have invited my loved one, my friend, but they

always have an excuse. Why can't I catch that fish?" "I do serve in Jesus' church, and no one seems to notice. I'm not much appreciated." Friends, Jesus calls us to be fishers of men, not catchers of men. We do the fishing...He does the catching. In whatever way you serve--hanging up a banner here in church, counting money, singing in the choir, singing from the pew, bringing your children to church with you, living your Christian faith at school, being a Christian example at work--God does not require us to get results; He requires us to be faithful. Fishing is no easy task. A fisherman can sit in his boat all day and get only a few nibbles. Fishing in Jesus' boat also takes patience. It takes simple trust in His promises. He promises to provide the results--the results He wants--in His own time.

Some older, faithful members may feel that their usefulness in the church is pretty insignificant. And yet what wonderful fishing they are doing just by coming to church week after week. Their dedication to Jesus' Word and Sacraments is a powerful witness to the rest of us. Many fish have been caught by the faithful witness of committed Christians. A Lutheran lady in Africa with no legs walked with her hands to church every Sunday...a mile each way...she never missed a service. This wonderful Christian woman could not serve in many ways, but what a fisher of men she was just by her faithfulness.

Sometimes fishermen will switch their lure, or they will put a different bait on the end of their hook. But that is not how we are to fish in Jesus' boat. We are not to try and attract fish by telling people what they want to hear; by changing our worship to make it more like the world around us. But we are to fish by, week after week, throwing out the net of the Gospel and letting that net bring in the fish. Sinners are drawn to Jesus and brought into His boat in one way only--by God's Spirit drawing them...drawing us...through the faithful proclamation of Law and Gospel. That faithful Word of God is cast out like a net here Sunday after Sunday, and it is cast out to the world through our church website where each and every sermon is available to read.

God forbid that we at Christ Lutheran Church ever change the net. The net that catches sinners is God's sure Word which says that we have offended Him by our sins; that we deserve His temporal and eternal punishment; that we will die forever unless He comes to deliver us. And the net is His precious Gospel declaring that God has come to deliver us in Jesus Christ; that God became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary; that He was born to suffer and die for every sinner; and that He was raised from the dead so that all who believe and are baptized in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

When a church fails to use this net of Christ, it ceases to be His church. But when we Christians keep using this net; when we call pastors to preach the net of God's Word faithfully; when we support them; and when we gather faithfully to be, ourselves, in that net always--then we can be confident that God will produce results through our fishing.

And so have you and I always been good fishermen? No we have not. But the same God who calls you to serve, also gave His life for you. He does not judge you by how well you fish. He forgives you when you fail. He strengthens you where you are weak. He invites you to work for Him because He loves you. And those whom you love, He also loves. And so through you--through your serving, your fishing, He will work so that His boat is filled with sinners like us--but sinners who know His love and forgiveness. Amen.