

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text – Mark 1:14-20

Theme: You will be fishers of people

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The time has come for us to roll up our sleeves and begin the work that God has prepared us to do. We are well into the new year, Peace Lutheran College has its opening chapel service on Tuesday – its time to begin.

Listen again to Jesus' calling of the first disciples. "Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

Move One – What it means to be a fisher

I'm curious as to who in our congregation likes to fish – could we please have a show of hands. From what I understand, fishing is Australia's most popular sport. It's wonderful that Jesus first called fishermen to be his disciples because when you think about it, there is virtually no age limit to being able to fish. From the smallest child, to the oldest person, we can either cast a line, or be present to watch and support and cheer on the one who is doing the fishing. Fishing is great for building communities, for developing friendships, and hopefully for providing a feed of good fish to eat.

When I think about how people learn to fish, for most people, it begins with going out with their dad or their mum. We sat down and watched them prepare their rods & lines, collect the bait and sort through the tackle. We might then travel by boat or car to the favourite fishing hotspot, before we watch with keen interest as bait is hooked and lines are cast.

So far, so good. But then as a novice, we become restless as it seems to take forever to catch anything. Boring! We become bored and so we are quick to head off in some new direction, to find something more exciting to do.

All of a sudden, there is great excitement as the tip of the rod bends down, the line is reeled in and the fish is landed. *Fantastic!* This fishing is great fun. But what about the many times we haul the lines in and there are no bites? What about the times the bait is pinched from the hook and we have nothing to show for it? What about the lines caught under a snag? You do everything you can to free the line, but you just know the line will break – *and* that was your very best, most expensive line that was *guaranteed* to catch something. It did – a snag!

Learning to fish is full of highs and lows, exciting times, but also times of testing, patience, and persistence. Some early learners of fishing grow disillusioned with the whole idea of fishing and so they give it away. Maybe they'll come back to it later. Maybe they'll re-learn the basics. Perhaps they'll develop the patience required, knowing that the best equipment and techniques don't always produce the best results. Perhaps there will seem to be nothing to show their efforts.

Fishing – it's most appropriate that Jesus called fishermen to be his first disciples. They knew what it meant to follow, to learn, to try, to gain experience and that sometimes your best efforts provide a great catch, but at other times – *nothing!*

Move Two – God call you to be fishers of people

Several places in the Old Testament refer to God as the one who is a fisherman. Ezekiel, prophesying against Egypt describes God as being the one who, "will put hooks in your jaws, ... and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams." (Ezek 29:4) God will judge and take the bold and oppressive Egypt out of their safe places where they will no be picked over by the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens (Ezek 29:5) Against the sins and guilt of Israel, Amos brings God's word of judgement, "... the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks." (Amos 4:2) There are other references which refer to God being the fisherman, and in most of these examples, God is a fisherman who brings in the catch in order to judge those caught up in the net.

Now into the New Testament strides Jesus who has grown into a man, has been baptised and God has spoken his word of judgement upon his Son, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11). Jesus moves north from the Jordan River where he was baptised, into the region of Galilee. John the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus fulfils the prophecy of John who said, "After me comes he who is mightier than I" (Mk 1:7). Jesus enters Galilee, not to escape a fate similar to John, but because the people of Galilee needed to hear the good

news that *now* is the time that Kingdom of God is at hand. What is the message that Jesus brings to this fallen people, caught in the middle of political and spiritual turmoil? “Repent and believe in the gospel?”

Here Jesus echoes the work of Jonah who was called to bring God’s judgement to the people of Nineveh, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4) The people of Nineveh needed to hear God’s message of judgement in order that they could repent, believe in God’s power and grace, then receive God’s forgiveness. Jonah fought and struggled against God’s commission to do his work, hence the story of Jonah spending three days in the belly of a fish, before God fished him out to continue in the work God had set before him.

Whereas Jonah and others like him struggled with God’s call into his divine service, Jesus was in one mind and Spirit with his Father. Now Jesus begins his ministry by calling disciples who would journey with him, learning what was required so they would be ready for the time they would be called to cast their own lines out.

Jesus is passing by the waters of Galilee when he sees Simon and Andrew who were fishing in the lake. Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” In this simple statement we hear Jesus’ invitation reaching through the ages to our ears also. “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of people.”

This is worth expanding upon. Firstly Jesus says, “Follow me.” This requires obedience. We are to follow Jesus, not anyone else. We aren’t called to follow a charismatic church leader, we’re not called to follow our own path (whatever we think works best). We are called to follow Jesus. His disciples spent years in his presence every single day. They were immersed in Jesus’ words and teaching, all intended to equip them for the time they would be doing their own fishing.

The next part of the invitation is, “I will make you become.” Simply following Jesus is just the beginning of the journey. No one is an accomplished fisher on day one. Sure, ‘beginners luck’ might help you bag a fish or two, but to become competent will require time and experience. But Jesus’ promise is that those who follow him *will become* fishers.

The final part is that you will become, “fishers of men”. The Greek word used here means clearly, men, women and children. Your net will be cast, seeking all people, without distinction. This work involves *people*. Whatever form of work this might take, you will be dealing with people, not programmes, not solutions to problems, but people, with all the hardwork, setbacks, and uncertainties working with people entails.

Move Three – The ‘catch’ will vary

I need to share a secret with you. I’m a lousy fisherman. I’m Cairns second worst fisherman. There will be someone worse than me, it’s just I haven’t met them yet! But even though I’m not a great fisherman, this doesn’t stop me from having a go. I love getting out there with my sons, trying our best to catch something, knowing all the while our chances are slim. Most of the time we don’t take anything to clean and fillet the fish, because this would raise the level of expectation! But we still enjoy spending time together, and every now and then we surprise ourselves and just recently we went to the reef on a friends boat and we caught a respectable feed.

Just as when we go fishing the results are uncertain, so as you cast your ‘spiritual nets’ out as faithful fishers of people, you will never be sure of what ‘success’ you might have. Just because the results may seem slim, doesn’t mean you don’t do all the preparation, buy or find the bait, buy new rods and lines. It is the same as we fish for people. We may or may not be very ‘successful’ but we are still called to make our preparations and cast out God’s Word through our words and actions.

Everyone who is here today, *has been called by God to be fishers of people*. There is no question about this, for if you weren’t, you wouldn’t be here now. God has equipped you for the journey and some of you will be at the point where you are watching and learning what it means to cast God’s Word into your daily lives. Others will be ready to give it a go, and you may be surprised at what God places into the net he has given you. Others will give it a go and be disappointed as it seems you never bring in the ‘big one’. There may be some people here who are seasoned fishers and they have gained the experience to cast their lines or net into the most promising places. They will have learned the patience required and that no matter how experienced they may be, their catch may still escape, it may wriggle off the hook, or it may free itself under a snag.

Whatever sort of fisher you may be, keep going out to ‘wet your line’. The more experience you gain, the more confident you will be given. And the great thing about fishing, the thing that keeps good fishers coming back is the truth that the ‘big one’ might be the very next one that bites.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you are called to be fishers of people. Amen.