

“Follow Me...Go and Be!”

A sermon based on Mark 1:14-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know the old adage, don't you? “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” How many of you know how to fish? How many of you could feed yourselves for a lifetime if you had to live off of fish? Me, neither.

Whether that adage is true in every circumstance or not, you understand the meaning, right? It's more worthwhile (or you're better off in the long run) to teach someone to do something (for themselves) rather than doing it for them (on a continual basis). Right, changing your kid's diapers for them once they start going to school would be less than ideal (and rather impractical), so you teach them how to use the potty. Running over to Grandma's house every time she needs to send an email or open an internet browser or even turn on her computer could become quite frustrating (especially if you live a ways away), so you take the time to show her and teach her how to do those simple tasks. It could become quite cumbersome always having to do the laundry for your husband (sorry Becky!), especially if you have things going on or if you're going to be out of town, so you show him (maybe over and over again) how to make those washer and dryer things work.

Today, Jesus' words are a good follow-up to last week's sermon. Does anyone remember the theme? *Come and see...follow me!* Today, Jesus' progresses on his invitation, moving to “Follow me....go and be!” He teaches us to fish, not so we can be fed and survive in this life. He teaches us to fish for people...so they can survive for eternity. It's a scary task; it's a daunting task. You might feel unfit, ill-prepared. But you can do it! You can and will go and be who Jesus casts you out to be....fishers of men...fishers of people.

I still remember when Jesus said that to me and my brother Peter, **“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”**

Now, we knew who Jesus was. This wasn't our first encounter with him. You see, little known fact (although John's gospel will tell you), but Peter and I were originally John the Baptist's disciples. We were there with John the day he saw Jesus and famously said, **“Look the Lamb of God!”** So, again, we knew him.

But for him that day to offer to teach us how to fish, it should have been a bit perplexing. I mean, did he even know the first thing about being a fisherman? Turns out, the answer was yes. I could tell you about the not too distant future when Jesus would step into our boat to preach to the crowds, and then, out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, he gave us the mind-blowing advice of simply throwing our nets on the other side of the boat when we hadn't caught anything all night, but we skeptically did and were blown away by the amount of fish it took two boats to haul to shore.

But that's not what he was offering us, professional training on how to be a fisherman. He was asking us to be his disciples, to follow him, to learn from him, then to follow in his footsteps and be “fishers of men,” to teach others about him and to share the good news about him.

And again, that offer should have been a bit perplexing. Do you know why? Look at the beginning of our verses here. ***“After John [the Baptist] was put in prison.”*** Yeah, John being in prison meant, yes, there was a huge void of people teaching the good news of a Savior...that huge gap, just waiting to be filled...we were needed.

But you could have also rightly expected this to be in the back of our minds....If God could not keep John (our good friend, our original teacher) out of prison, why would anyone want to follow the one whom John proclaimed as the Messiah (especially some of his known associates)?

And then, to top it all off, think about who it was Jesus was calling to be his disciples. Not some protégés gleaming with potential. Not standout students highly recommended by the local priests. Just us. Normal guys, living normal lives, with normal jobs. Nothing extravagant. Nothing that special. Just fishermen...called to be fishers of men.

Does that resume sound somewhat similar to what yours might look like? Not that Jesus is necessarily calling you to drop whatever you're doing in order to join the fulltime public ministry (although he's always got a need for people there). But his call for me is the same as his call for you, "Follow me...whoever you are, whatever your lot in life is, follow me. I want you to be fishers of people. I want you to go out, every day of your life, ready and willing to talk about me and to share with others who I am and what I've done for them."

And your response is...your response has been? Peter and I, James and John, we dropped what we were doing and we immediately followed Jesus.

Are you that quick? "Well, I know there's a need for more Jesus in our world today, even in my own community. There's no doubt about that, but...but I hear how Christians in other countries are being treated, persecuted, jailed, even slaughtered, not even for talking about Jesus, but simply because they follow him. And that's the sea Jesus wants me to go fishing in?"

"Ok, maybe those aren't worries I have to have in my context, but even here, in my own country, in my own backyard, I see what's going on. Marches, demonstrations, protests, people tearing down the very morals Jesus stands for. A lot of days, this doesn't seem like a pool of fish biting or a friendly place eager or even open to hearing about Jesus."

I can understand your timidity or hesitance in the face of real and hurtful opposition (I mean, look what happened to my original teacher, John the Baptist). Not that that negates the call to go, but I understand.

But maybe what it is, even more than that, is what I struggled with as well. And that's who am I?

I don't know if they still show this during Christmastime or not, but for years, CBS would always show the original Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. And one of my favorite parts was where Rudolph ends up on the Island of Misfit Toys, where they lament, "Who would want us (a polka-dot stuffed elephant, a caboose with square wheels, a cowboy riding an ostrich)?"

Is that what you feel like when it comes to Jesus' call to go? Not that I'm calling you misfits, but maybe that describes your level of comfort in going and being a fisher of men. Yeah, it's nice play on words, Jesus, to call me, a fisherman, to be a fisher of men, but that didn't make me qualified to go.

Have you ever said something like that? “I’m just a fisherman.” “I’m just a kid or a student; I’m not even in the real world yet.” “I’m just a stay-at-home parent; I watch the kids all day.” “I have my job (whatever it is you do), and that makes me nowhere near qualified to be Jesus’ fisherman.” “I’m not confident. I’m not eloquent. I’m not worthy. I feel inept. Why would he want me? It doesn’t seem to be a good match.”

Whatever it is on the surface that prevents you from heeding Jesus’ call to go, you know what it is, deep down in the depths of your own heart, you know what stops you and me and every person from being a fisher of men for Jesus. It’s sin. It’s serious.

Who am I, that Jesus would want me to be his fisherman? Who am I, that Jesus would want me, period? I’m a sinner. I’m a misfit. I’m a no one. But to Jesus, I’m a someone he desperately wanted. And so, when I was sinking down in the depths of sin, headed toward the deep Abyss, Jesus lowered the hook of his grace, snagged me, and reeled me up into the boat of salvation.

And I’m not alone. Jesus’ catch of fish, his catch of souls, has been a greater haul than even what Peter and I experienced later when Jesus gave us the miraculous catch of fish. And that includes you, too.

But why would he want us? For no other reason than his love, his mercy, and his grace. Right, why else would Jesus come down from heaven to live and die and rise for us...to endure temptations and suffering and the cross and grave for us than love...unconditional, underserved, self-sacrificing, totally committed love? It makes about as much sense as sending normal fishermen to be fishers of souls. But he did!

That’s the good news! Jesus told us, **“The kingdom of God is near,”** and so he did what it took to make sure you and I and many others would be prepared for it when it does with his life, his death, and his resurrection.

And that’s why he wants us to be his fishers of people as well. This is why we fish...because the time has come; the kingdom of God is near. And you, you can follow in our footsteps and drop everything without delay to follow Jesus as his fishermen.

I know, it can be a tall and daunting task, but listen to what Jesus says, **“I WILL make you fishers of men.”** For me, it wasn’t I dropped everything, followed Jesus, and immediately I was “Pastor Andrew...Pastor Awesome.” It’s a job we grew into, following Jesus for 3½ years, listening to him, learning from him, watching him.

It’s a job God will grow you into as well. The apostle Paul reminds us, **“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”** It’s a job God grows you into as you experience his love more and more and as he grows you in your faith in him, both of which happen how? Yep, as you’re in God’s Word, he makes you competent and confident and an all-around better fisherman.

God uses you, whoever you are, whatever your lot in life, to be his fishermen. And maybe it’s a good thing we have fishermen as our example here because you don’t need to be an expert angler to fish. They even have kid’s poles, just put the bait on and wait for the fish to nibble and pull it up.

One of our hymns sing, **“If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can share the love of Jesus, you can say he died for all.”** Even a child can sing “Jesus loves me, this I know” to someone else, and that’s fishing. It’s that simple.

And, so we have God, we have the fishermen (you and me). Now all we need is fish. You know, you might ask, why would God want me to go and be his fisherman? It’s because fish out there need you.

Have you ever heard of click-bait? If you’re active on the internet, you’re probably familiar with this. It’s content on the internet whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page. Now, most of the time, your eyes just gloss over these ads, this click-bait, but every once in a while, something’s there that grabs your attention, reels you in.

The fish God provides for you out there, they’ll provide the click-bait. Maybe it’s the couple going through marital problems. The acquaintance who is wondering what she did wrong that God is letting all this bag stuff happen to her. The family who just lost a loved one to old age – expected, but tough nonetheless. Your neighbor giving subtle hints that they’re looking for someplace where they can feel accepted and loved...they’re looking for a new church. A co-worker who’s having a rough day and could really use a word of encouragement; making it biblical would be tons better.

You know, after a while Peter and I fully understood Jesus’ rich metaphor “fishers of men.” We would discover that our “catch” would not be snagged and sold; rather, it would be rescued and set free!

That’s what you get to do. You get to reel in these fish to set them free from sin and guilt and shame by giving what they crave the most, the good news of a Savior. And again, no matter who you are, what your lot in life, you can do that. You can do it!

Fellow fishers of me, what a privilege, what an honor, that God would use someone like you and me to reveal his glory...us jars of clay...frail, inept, unwilling, scared, unfit, called nonetheless. So now, we’re the reflection of Jesus’ glory and his love and his forgiveness.

Friends, **“the time has come.”** As a fisherman, and you probably know as well, the fish aren’t always biting. But they’re there. And you and I, we’ll be ready, with the simple message of God’s love, of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. We’re ready to follow...to go and be fishers for Jesus...to show his glory...to share his glory. And then enjoy the haul...in this lifetime and the next. Amen.