

Sermon – 5th Epiphany
Luke 5:1-11
February 10, 2019

“Gone Fishin”

You are a fish. You are plump and juicy, full of fight, swimming around of Lake Pewaukee. There are dozens of fish houses (or these days - fish mansions) up on the surface full of people who want you to make it worth their while to spend an entire day on a sheet of ice. Even if you avoid their enticements in a few months there will be 100's of boats on the lake every weekend full of the latest sonar equipment designed to detect you. They come after you with invisible mono-filament lines and lures darting here and there trying to make you think they might actually be a good lunch for you...but in fact you, dear fish, would become lunch or dinner for the person holding that line! These fisher-persons will be in your little fish-face all day long. They want you, dear fish. They want YOU!

Well, you're not really a fish are you? But today I want you to think of yourself as one. Of course you are a person - a sentient, oxygen breathing, making plans for yourself day by day, person, doing so much more than just swimming around, eating, and making little fishes. You are a rational, thinking, feeling human child of God. But for nearly 2000 years you and people just like you have been pursued with the energy, determination, and creativity that fish are pursued with all on the command of your creator and Savior Jesus. The apostles of the Bible were the first "*fishers of men*", but each generation has had its own, and they have one singular goal...to catch people like you for Jesus Christ. They're not selfish or sinister people as some assert - they are simply doing what Jesus told them they'd be doing. They want you to hear the message of salvation in Jesus, believe it, let it imbue every facet of your life, give you hope and make amazing changes in your "personhood."

Jesus has commissioned every one of these "*fishers of men*", and what's interesting, no truly amazing is that unlike most fish, when you are caught for Jesus sake by the Holy Spirit, you don't just become part of the catch...you become one of the catchers. That is what our lesson from Luke is about - being fish and fisher...person. Simon, James and John were the first caught only to become catchers, but you are no less esteemed and valuable and capable. Over the years some have done their job extraordinarily well...Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Martin Luther King Jr, Billy Graham, Mother Teresa...and the person who passed faith on to you.

Not all do well of course. Jesus commissioned Judas too. Peter was full of compromise at least early on and Thomas full of doubt. Luther it is said has as many demons as angels. The church has had some disastrous expeditions over the years – the Crusades and the Inquisitions to name a few. To the extent we preachers are seen as fishers of men, I need not inform you of our failures and frailties. Moreover, or because of them, lots of fish get away, wriggle off the hook so to speak, each generation has new schools of fish who, after they get a bit bigger start to seriously doubt whether they want to stay this thing we call Jesus' boat and as often as not they cite the apparent sins of some of their fellow fish as the number one reason.

Some have outright abandoned ship...deciding for other waters. Yet for the most part fishing over the years has been pretty good. It's a settled issue that Jesus is serious about catching and keeping you. What is not so settled is you. Do you fight and wiggle and dart into the depths of your own emotions and sinful habits trying to break free from Christ? If you do, you're not unique little fish, because you like every human knows instinctively that there are consequences if you are caught. Luther made it clear that once out of the water the battle is really on – you dear fish, convicted and cleansed of your sin, become a tempting target of those who keep offering “other waters” and you back down in the depths with them.

Like a magnet's head, you attract temptation and the attention of the devil like you were the only trophy he hadn't added to his wall. If you are removed from those waters the effect on your life may, indeed should be great. Sinners, like fish get used to breathing a certain way - cultural imperatives and Satan's old reliable – pride keep you going and get you convinced you could do worse. All of that changes when you are caught by the Holy Spirit, taken from the school you swim in and are schooled by the Word of God.

But know this dear fish. Once God catches you, God keeps you - he doesn't throw anybody back and he doesn't cut bait. True, when you find yourself with a new name – disciple you'll want to flop back out of the boat - certain that in the new air of faith and obedience, you're going to die. Your gills...lungs and heart just aren't used to breathing this way. And that's precisely what the great “*Fisher of Men*” intends ...that you die, to all that you once were.

It is his intent that you become a fish out of the old water...because then you change. You begin to breathe the clean air of faith and faithful living. You are “re-born” - but not thrown in some restrictive fish bowl, not some live-well regimented life of “*the respectable church member*”, but the vast, clean, though not always familiar waters of life with Jesus Christ - the waters of baptism. Once placed in them, you just know how fowl the old waters you swam in really were. You understand and feel how restricted your breathing was in that old life and how tired the waters of sin made you. They were murky and easy to hide in...but fatal to try to live in.

Strange as it may seem, a fish can drown. But don't be afraid - God has a lifeline of grace out 24/7 little fish – so that you won't, ever. In God's waters only two regulations exist - fishing season never closes and limits on the catch are never imposed. For you dear fish...and fisherperson...every day's a good day to wet a line. AMEN