

For most who like to fish, fishing is a hobby, maybe even a sport, it's for enjoyment. We may eat fish, but that's not the primary reason for fishing. For the people in the story, there were exactly two reasons to fish... one was food, the other was money. They and their family either ate what they caught or sold or traded it as the means of their livelihood. When Jesus said to them I will make you fish for people, in their everyday world he wasn't talking about sport or a hobby or something they did for fun... he was referring to their daily sustenance.

Effectively that call from Jesus is still with us today. But what are our motives when or if we ever actual fish for people? Do we think that if more people come into the church, it will sustain the church for another generation, or that it will ensure there is enough money coming on the plates to look after all the expenses? It sounds pretty good, but that line of thinking, if that's where it stops, really isn't much better than fishing for fish... because that line of thinking focuses on sustaining a church rather than extending the kingdom of God - which was Jesus' primary motive brought out of a place of love.

When Jesus said I will make you fish for people he was saying to his disciples that he would change their way of life... and in fact, fishing for people wasn't in itself going to be their work... fishing for people was going to be a result of their work. After all the first part of what he said was actually to follow him.

It was a radical call to obedience, and the disciples heard it. They walked away from their families and their jobs to follow Jesus. Andrew and Peter, James and John were casting and mending their nets... but immediately, when they heard the invitation, they followed. And it's interesting to me that in the next sentence, which is the last verse of our story today, Jesus took them into the synagogues... Jesus takes these ordinary fishermen who smell of fish and the first thing he does with them is go to church... I can't help but wonder how comfortable they were in this new situation... or for that matter how comfortable the people who usually ran the church were with them being there. And that continued throughout the gospel story.

If you look at some of the things they went through, it's pretty clear that Jesus led them into some situations that would not have been comfortable... probably even into some situations they did not want to be in... but through it all, they kept trusting him... they kept following him... in a manner of speaking, they stayed in the boat... because that's what fishermen do... all day and all night if need be until they had a full catch... Like fishing, Through the frustration, impatience and shame that may have occasionally come from being associated with Jesus... even through the controversy and the threat against their own lives. They followed Jesus...

Like fishing, you never really know what's going to happen next. There's always the risk of disappointment, but for some reason what these guys were seeing in and through the life of one man was enough for them to decide not to go back to their nets.

As the disciples followed and as they learned, they would see things that they had never dreamed of. As they shared what they saw they would tell first-hand stories of things that would have been hard to imagine. As they lived the new way of being that Jesus called them to, they would shape the foundation of the church... even to this very day. Their witness opened up the understanding that God wasn't just the God of the Jews but the God of all people. They didn't fish for people in order to sustain their own way of life... they fished for people to share the good news of God's kingdom. When we fish for people it's to increase the kingdom and not necessarily our own little corner of it. If people find Christ through our witness and then decide to worship in another church that works best for their circumstances then that's fine with me. We can't be territorial.

As people come, enter, and even join the church family we need to keep in mind the role of the fisherman.....Fishing for people involves patience and persistence to meet someone wherever they are, on their own terms. It involves being open to understand their point of view and taking the risk to receive them exactly as they are. It involves allowing ourselves to be changed more than we might expect them to be. After all, in all of this, God is the one who acted first to reach out to the fishermen... and also to receive each of us exactly as we are. And the disciples may have started out as fishermen looking for sustenance... but when they heard and accepted the invitation to follow Christ they become fishers of people... and those simple fishermen went on to change the world. Today if you can say that Christ is in your life, then he has called you to be a fisher of people for his a Kingdom. So who will you be fishing for in this coming week?