



“Goin’ Fishin”

February 8, 2026

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead

Isaiah 9:1-4 and Matthew 4:12-23

Even as a young man, long before Uncle Clyde moved from North Carolina to Tennessee, he was no stranger to the area, because every chance he got, he drove the crooked, winding roads from Marshall through Hot Springs and Newport—all in search of fish that were just waiting for him in Douglas Lake. (Douglas Lake, as you likely know, was built by TVA in the 1940’s, and is 60 miles long and covers over 44,000 acres.) In time, Uncle Clyde moved near Douglas Lake, along with my Aunt Doris. Thankfully, he did happen to find a job, and later start his own business, so that he had *something to do* when the fish weren’t biting.

“What does it take to be a good fisherman?” I once asked my Uncle Clyde. “Well,” he said, “You have to fish a lot—so you know where the fish are.” Interesting. I expected something else, something like, “Well, you have to be a patient person...you have to like solitude...you have to be at home with hot sun and mosquitoes and all sorts of smelly things...” But, no, “You have to fish a lot!” Although he rarely got into exaggerated fish tales, as fishermen are prone to do, he did

have a lot to say about the sport, and it was always fun to listen to him talk about boat fishing and trot lines and different types of reels for different types of fishing. And, at some point, it was not uncommon for him to reel the conversation back to another beloved topic—how to be a faithful Christian. “Well, Glenda, some fish hit one thing, and some hit another,” I can still hear him say. “People are like that too. What gets through to one doesn’t always get through to another. At least, that’s how it seems to me.” Spoken like a man who knew a thing or two about fishing, and maybe more about people than he realized.

I invite you to listen to a portion of our gospel reading again, but this time from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*:

Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed. A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee’s sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father.

When I was a little girl, I was drawn to my Uncle Clyde like a fish to bait. There was something enticing about the way he talked—kind and gentle. Honestly, I don’t remember him ever raising his voice to anyone. He was the first person I ever heard pray out loud—at my grandparent’s house prior to Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. Several years later, when I was twelve years old, I, too, came over the river and through the woods to live near Uncle Clyde and Aunt Doris. By that time, they had two sons, Kevin and Kenny. Kenny was nearly two years old. Born with spina bifida, he had fluid on his spine that caused him to be paralyzed from the waist down. But that didn’t stop him from scooting all over the place using his arms. He was such a happy child. One of my fondest memories of him was one day when he was playing on the floor and saying his new word over and over again: “Snaggle-puss.” Every time he’d say it, he’d burst out laughing and so would everyone else. Once when I stayed the night after one of his many surgeries, Kenny was having difficulty breathing. I must have been scared because I couldn’t sleep. That’s why I overheard Uncle Clyde, late in the night through the walls, softly talking to someone, softly talking to God.

I learned about prayer from my dear uncle. Oh, he never sat me down and gave me praying lessons. I don’t believe he ever tried to teach me “Now I lay me down to sleep,” or “Our Father who art in heaven” ...or any other *specific* prayer. No, he taught by example—prayers of thanks around the dinner table—and prayers of anguish when physical healing seemed unlikely on this side of eternity. The truth is, I was so enamored by Uncle Clyde I would have followed him anywhere so it’s a good thing that the place he led me was to the church, and the person he led me to was Jesus.

After Jesus learns of John the Baptist's arrest, he makes his home in Capernaum by the Sea just as the prophet foretold. Then Jesus begins to proclaim, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Sounds a lot like John's preaching, doesn't it? But there's a significant difference. With Jesus, the kingdom of heaven has not only come near—the kingdom of heaven is present in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. However, this is yet to be revealed.

First, Jesus needs to gather a few followers. He starts looking for them by the Sea of Galilee where he finds Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting a net into the water. "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Without hesitation, they follow him. Then he sees two other brothers, James and John. They're in the boat with their father mending nets. They, too, drop everything to follow Jesus. And where does he lead them? Throughout Galilee, teaching people, loving people, accepting people, healing people. With all that he says and all that he does, Jesus shows those who follow him what the kingdom of heaven looks like: There is room for everyone. There are no insiders and outsiders. Everyone is welcome to the table. Everyone is beloved. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

That day by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave four men a grand invitation, "Come, follow me, and I will teach you how to fish for people." How strange those words must have sounded to fishermen. Fish for people—how do we do that? It's a question we are still pondering, centuries later. While the good news of Jesus' transforming power remains the same, the way that we communicate that message changes from generation to generation.

So, I ask you, First Presbyterian Church, in the year 2026: how are we fishing for people? What are we doing that lets the world know we're still in the fishin' business? "Well, that was then and this is now," we might say. "Jesus doesn't expect us to be doing that kind of work anymore." But that won't hold water, not if we consider the Great Commission that we find at the end of Matthew's gospel. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."

Maybe we feel like only the disciples were given the gift of evangelism and since that's not our gift, we're off the hook. But the truth is, at our baptism we were filled with God's Spirit. Baptism marks us as believers who are part of the body of Christ. Though we certainly have different gifts, still as the church—this church—we are surely equipped to do what Jesus commands. And what does Jesus command first and foremost? That, too, is spelled out plainly in Matthew's gospel: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus, God incarnate, comes to the earth to show all of humanity what love looks like. Moreover, Jesus comes to change the world, so people no longer sit in deep darkness. Do you know someone who is sitting in darkness? Have anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, loneliness, marital problems, illness, addiction, grief, financial woes—have they come knocking on your neighbor's

door—maybe even moved in? As a fisher of people, what bait might you use to point them toward the light of God’s love and mercy and grace?

Many years ago, my Uncle Clyde used the bait of kindness, the bait of being a praying man, and the bait of inviting me to church to draw me toward God, and for that I will be forever thankful. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we, too, are called to follow in the footsteps of the disciples to learn the trade of “fishin’ for people.” We need to fish a lot, if we want to do it well. It’s still an honorable trade with life-changing results. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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