



The Family Business
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; February 9, 2025
 5th Sunday after Epiphany
 Psalm 138; Luke 5:1-11

Fishing, which has been around for some 40,000 years, began as a means of survival in prehistoric times and turned, eventually, into industry, sport, and recreation. Fishing techniques have changed from fishing by hand, or using spears or nets, to using fishing lines and poles. And nowadays, fishing poles are made of fiberglass instead of hickory and bamboo, and tackle boxes are filled with fancy fishhooks and artificial lures. Change is part of every aspect of life, isn't it?

I am fascinated by the etymology of words, how they originate and how their meanings shift over time. Often, words are born right under our noses. Take the word "google," for example. Its first recorded use was in 1998 when Google co-founder, Larry Page, wrote on a mailing list, "Have fun and keep googling." Now, most of us jump on the World Wide Web numerous times a day to "google" one thing or another. Over time, new words are created, and old words are redefined. Take the word, "nice." It used to mean silly or foolish—far from the compliment it is today. Originally, the word "naughty" was not used to describe someone behaving badly. It described a person who had naught or nothing. Naughty.

The meaning of phrases can change, too. For instance, "Fish or cut bait," is a common expression that means something totally different now than it did initially. When I googled it, I learned that the original expression came out of the fishing industry, where fishermen must decide who is to fish, and who is to cut the bait used for fishing. Both tasks are equally important to the goal of

catching fish, and everyone has a role to play. Now though, when someone says, “Fish or cut bait,” we understand it to mean it is time to make a decision—stop hesitating. Fish or cut bait.

In our reading from the gospel, Jesus gets on a boat and starts fishing—for people. When all is said and done, he turns to Simon and his fishing buddies and tells them not to be afraid because they are joining his family business—the business of catching people. And they do! They leave everything to catch people with Jesus. Another way to describe “catching people,” is “evangelism” but that is a word that makes us squirm. We’ve witnessed too many street corner preacher types asking, “Are you saved?” We have seen televangelists and mega-church leaders who act concerned about people’s souls when all they really care about is what’s in their wallets.

Let’s pause for a moment to consider the phrase, “catching people.” When Jesus says, “From now on you will be catching people,” he is not saying that you will be frightening, entrapping, manipulating or pressuring people. Rather, in the original Greek, the idea of “catching people” indicates that followers of Jesus will be *rescuing* people; they will be *saving* people; they will be *inviting* people to live full lives, motivated by the love of Christ. Jesus instructs his disciples to lay aside their nets and take up another mode of fishing, fishing for people. At its core, evangelism is making connections, building relationships, meeting people where they are, and offering to others the hope that you have found. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, *living* the good news, *being* the good news—that is the work of the family business.

Over time, the meaning of words and phrases change. Fishing techniques change. But one thing that has been slow to change is how the church practices evangelism. For nearly 100 years, we have understood fishing for people to mean hooking those people *out there* and reeling them *in here*. And when things have gotten tough, we have chosen to change bait or build bigger boats. Build it and they will come. Make it flashy and entertaining and they will swallow it hook, line, and sinker.

Without question, the institutional church was in trouble before a global pandemic cast us ashore, but since then, churches near and far are in a downward spiral. So much so, if we intend to stay in the family business, we have no choice but to change course. Our motivation cannot be to get those people out there to come in here. Instead, our *modus operandi* must be to meet people where they are and to share the love of Jesus.

If we wonder what bait we are to use, we need look no further than Jesus, who used things like compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, kindness, humility, mercy, and love. Might such “bait” provide food for souls in our fast-paced world? Could it be that these days, people need the love of Jesus simply to make it through the day?

If you have been following the news, you know that a lot has happened the last few weeks—a lot that assures us our country is as divided as it has ever been. Half the country feels like the American Dream is in peril while the other half feels it is being rescued. There are those who are

content with the status quo, and there are others who are terrified of what the future may hold. How can the church help? Does the church still have something to offer our weary world?

Might I suggest that what the church has to offer is the good news to which Jesus has always pointed us? For example, instead of the arrogance of believing only those who look like me and think like me and pray like me will enter the pearly gates, how about the good news of Jesus who humbly left the halls of glory to welcome us into God's new kin-dom – where there is room for everyone at the table of grace? Instead of greed for the almighty dollar, how about the good news of the power of being generous so that everyone has enough, but no one has it all? Instead of being overcome by anxiety caused by doomscrolling on our devices, how about the good news that Jesus models when he goes away by himself to recharge and commune with his Abba Father in silent prayer and meditation? Instead of working ourselves to the bone, how about the good news that Jesus demonstrates by living a balanced life – including good work, fellowship with friends, and Sabbath keeping? If our faith really matters to us, our assignment has always been the same – come what may – to feed the hungry, to help sick people get well, to befriend the lonely, to help the invisible be seen, to protect the bullied, to comfort the grieved, and to welcome everyone home. So, make no mistake, the church still has a lot to offer our weary world.

It's been said that evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Where do you find bread? Whether you are here in person or joining us virtually, it is my hope and prayer that you find bread for your soul here. And it is my hope and prayer that you feel compelled to share your experience of God's love—whether the experience happens within these walls or outside them. Tell someone why being a follower of Christ matters to you. Why? Because you care and because you long to show others where to find the bread of life.

As followers of Christ, we are called to contribute to the family business of saving the world for Jesus. Oh, we can dig our heels in and refuse to accept these changing times, or we can bravely get on the boat that the Spirit has sent and see where the wind blows. Even though the church does not look like it did a hundred years ago, that does not mean the church has failed. Rather, it means that we are living in a new era and, even now, we are being re-formed. Since the motto of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is “Reformed and always being reformed,” these are not totally unfamiliar waters for us—or at least—they shouldn't be.

For those who have been baptized into the family business, the job before us is to catch people—to rescue people—to save people—to invite people to live full lives, patterned after the life of Jesus. Motivated by love, and equipped by the Spirit, there is much work for us to do. In fact, now may just be the time to fish or cut bait. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.