

fished quite a bit as a kid, but I must admit I haven't been in a while. There are certain things I remember though, and those things I do remember are translatable to the kind of fishing that Jesus asks his disciples to engage in: fishing for people. (I must admit that I haven't done that as recently as I should as well though). some lessons i learned about fishing when I was a boy translate well to what Jesus is calling his disciples to do.

Fishing Requires patience. You don't cast your line with any assurance that is going to be bitten. Cast many times.

There's a woman I know named Margaret who is bubbling over with invitation. She wants everyone she meets to walk with her on the path of discipleship. She's always casting out her line. She'll

invite the grocery clerk, the lady at the drive through bank window, or the police officer who had just pulled her over for a ticket. I used to look at her with wonder and amazement because she felt so comfortable doing something that made me so uncomfortable. When I became a minister, I discovered that like it or not, I would need a portion of her spirit to help people feel welcome and excited about the ministry we were doing at the church to which I was appointed. We must be willing to cast our line into the water without any assurance that our invitation will be taken or not. We are surrounded by people who need to be "caught" by Christ. They may have gone to church once or twice a year here or elsewhere, or they

may have never been involved with a church, but we quite literally surrounded by people who have no home for their faith.

Strategy and a knowledge of the ins and outs of the area helps tremendously.

the best fishers know their environment like the back of their hand. They know that a nest of brim usually congregate around that old fallen tree, or that the bend in the river usually contains a group of trout resting and in the mood for an occasional fly. To be effective evangelists, we should best know our own context and what we offer to our community.

You need bait and a willingness to go with different bait if what you're using isn't catching.

One of my favorite lures in my boyhood tacklebox was a big, colorful bellied fish with two multipronged hooks coming out of it. I think I liked it because even if I didn't have any fish on it, I still felt like I was reeling something in time after time. But for the little pond that I fished in, that lure didn't make much sense. It probably scared off the fish more than attracting them, because I was primarily catching perch and brim and the occasional bass.

Sometimes, in order to catch fish for Jesus, we have to be willing to change our lure. Sometimes we have to put aside our "pet

projects" and favorite ways of doing things if we are going to attract new people.

You don't just go from a fish biting to the fish being in your basket, you've got to reel them in.

One "hello" on a visitor's first visit isn't enough. We need to have consistent and continued contact with those who have taken an interest in our faith community.

Dynamite is an immoral way to fish. I used to enjoy tossing in an m-60 firecracker into the pond and watch all the little water

creatures float up to the surface. but looking back on it, I really regret that I used to do that as a kid.

Some brands of Christianity employ the "scare the hell out of people" approach to evangelism. They harp on the crux of believing certain things in a certain way and the consequences they perceive are in the future for those who don't subscribe to their ideas. In my opinion, this isn't the kind of "Good news" that we are called to share in our community. We are here to invite people to walk with us the path of discipleship. We don't have a privileged standpoint, we are broken and faulty people seeking the companionship and shared journey of other broken and faulty people.

Those churches that use the "dynamite" of fear, threats, and damnation are likely to get the human equivalent of dead fish floating to the surface. We're looking for someone different: vital and vibrant fish who can contribute to our community.

Cleaning fish can be a stinky process. Cleaning catfish is one of the worst smells I've ever encountered.

Likewise, when we do attract fish who've been scouring the bottom of the pond for nourishment, the process that the Spirit undertakes to "clean" that fish sometimes causes an unpleasant environment. We must persevere in our calling to "fish for people"

even when the results of that action cause consternation and strife in the community.

But all these analogies are built on the image of a fisherman with a rod and line. And so we probably make the equation in our own minds, since we go fishing as a past time, that perhaps evangelism is a past time. Perhaps evangelism is only something for those who enjoy it. You probably notice that Andrew and Simon Peter and James and John aren't standing on the lakeshore artfully casting a line into the water. No idealistic soft lit river with Robert Redford's narrative voice in the back ground. These men are doing hard labor with heavy nets. They are making a living.



I think Jesus expects us to “fish for people” with that kind of mentality. Inviting people into a life of discipleship to Christ, reaching out to those whom we know and love and pulling them along to follow Christ with us, is not a past-time. Fishing for people should be a livelihood for us. It should be basic to our walk with Christ. Part of the invitation that I’m giving to you to give to others is to worship the Living God with us here in community. But that’s not all and that certainly doesn’t have to come first. Sometimes, folks will respond to the invitation to join us in service to the poor or unfortunate. Sometimes we might invite others to look at the world around them with a different perspective when we encounter hostility or racism or narrow mindedness.

These are all invitations into discipleship. If you think I'm trying to convince you today that you all need to go out and invite someone to church, you're hearing me too specifically. Think more broadly about what your life of discipleship means to you. That's what you can best "advertise" when it comes to sharing the grace of Christ with others. Coming to church to be in worship is important, but it isn't all there is.

I heard about a pastor who used this fishing model for evangelism, and a woman in our congregation said to him, "You know something, I hate fishing. And as for fishing for people -- I don't have the kind of time available you talked about. Does Christ have any place for a harried mom with four children?"

The pastor thought about that and came to the conclusion that the principles behind the text were not, "Help wanted - Fishermen Only!" The point is that you and I were meant to become a part of the tremendous divine plan to bring light to a dark world wherever we happen to be. The carpenter's invitation reads, "Follow me and I will make you build people." The accountant will hear it as, "Follow me and I will make you help people know they count." The waitress will hear, "Follow me and I will make you serve the spiritual hunger of people." The physician will hear, "Follow me and I will make you a healer of people's souls." A beleaguered mom's call is, "Follow me and I will make you a builder of children."

Do you see? You were meant to be a part of God's divine plan to bring light, hope and meaning to a dark world. You can do this where you are. In fact, Christ needs you where you are. Fishermen will reach the fishermen. Teachers will reach the teachers. Truck drivers will reach the truck drivers. Moms (and Dads) will reach other moms and dads.

What an amazing wonderful thing that you were designed to bring the light of God to a corner of the world that only you could possibly reach. Somewhere, someday, you will encounter that person that no one else in all of God's creation could reach with the light of God.

The only question left is -- "Are you available to bring the light of God to them?" It's what you were meant to do!