

Fishing

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. Let me add my welcome to Mark and Andrews. I'm Vijay. It's lovely, I guess, that we can still meet together despite everything that's happened.

We give thanks to God for technology and for those who have put this service together and made it happen with barely any notice. So thanks to them. Thanks to the Lord. And if you could please keep the passage open, which Tim read, that would be really helpful.

And this passage actually is very exciting for me because it's a story about fishing. I love fishing. My wife, Rachel, she's going to let me buy a little boat later this year. Fingers crossed.

But if I invited you to come fishing with me, would you come along? If that doesn't interest you at all, don't worry. Rachel couldn't be less interested herself.

But let me see if I can sell you on the idea. So you'll have to get up at 5 a.m. in the morning when it's still dark. You won't get home till well after lunchtime, so most of the day.

[1 : 06] You'll have to wear warm clothing, but also clothes you can get wet. So something really old and daggy. You'll need to be willing to let your hands get dirty, to bait your own hooks, to fillet and gut your own fish.

And look, there's no nice way to say it. Your fingers will smell awful afterwards. There's a lot of downtime while we're waiting for the fish to catch. So you'll need to bring a good book along with you or you'll have me nattering in your ear.

And most of all, to be honest, the chances of us actually catching any fish will be pretty slim. But hey, it's called fishing and not catching after all.

Rachel said to me once, she said, You spend all this money fishing, but when are you actually going to catch anything? And I thought that was rather hurtful. Because on the screen, here I am catching a whopper.

There, that's me. Please ignore the fact that my face doesn't match the background. So anyway, the question is, would you like to go fishing with me? And obviously, none of you are going to say yes.

[2 : 18] None of you are going to take up my offer. But in the passage, I think that's the offer Jesus gives to his disciples. Verse 10, From now on, you will fish for people.

You see, like me, Jesus loves a spot of fishing. And that is how we find him in this story. Verse 1, One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.

The idea here is that the normal fishing is over. There's boats on the water's edge left there by the fishermen. And so Jesus takes over their boats for a spot of people fishing instead.

And there are so many people around that Jesus has to jump in Simon's boat and use that like a pulpit out of the water's edge.

End of verse 3, Then he sat down from the boat and taught the people. You see, Jesus knows the right bait to use when you're people fishing.

[3 : 22] Verse 1, Verse 3, He sat down to teach the people. I wonder if we had to think what is the right bait to catch people to fill up our pews.

We might tend to go for other things. Maybe revamping our music ministry, making that more exciting. Maybe we'll take off our dog collars and make ourselves seem less Anglican, because after all, it's organized religion that puts people off.

Maybe we could try and show how God really moves with the times and try and be really progressive in our thinking. But a boring old word?

And it's wrong, isn't it, to say that the Bible is boring, because it's always electric when Jesus starts speaking. People come from far around to hear the special one.

In our generation, we're tempted to lose confidence in the power of the Bible taught well. But if you're in the business of people fishing, it's actually the right bait to use.

[4 : 32] But when Jesus had finished speaking, verse 4, He did something you're never supposed to do to other fishermen. And that is, tell them how to fish.

If you came fishing with me, you'd see lots of crusty old men lined up along the piers. They keep to themselves. They won't talk to you. And the etiquette is, you're not allowed to talk to them.

I think it's because they're all on the jetty, you know, escaping their wives. But anyway, imagine if I came down to the jetty with my clergy collar on and started telling these old men how to fish.

The truth is, I would be chopped up into bait pretty soon. And you would feel the same. Imagine if I came down in my clergy collar to your workplace and started telling you how to do your job.

Simon, he seems a bit put off by Jesus. Verse 5. Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But he has seen the power of the word in action.

[5 : 37] And so, end of verse 5. Because you say so, I will let down the nets. Because you say so, I'm at Jesus' word. The word which draws people in.

Which last week frees them from death and evil. Well, look at what it does here. Verse 6. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

Now, I know that you can train a dog to do things and I think you can train a bird as well. Can you train a cat? Probably, it'll probably just do its own thing, wouldn't it? But surely you can't train a fish.

Roll over. Play dead. Come to my side of the fishbowl. Surely that will never happen. But in Jesus' story, he summoned so many fish that their nets began to break.

And generally speaking, fishermen never let the facts get in the way of a good story. So, you know, I once caught a fish this big. Well, one day, Jesus' disciples went fishing.

[6 : 42] They caught so many fish that not only did their nets break, but verse 7, their boats began to break as well. And they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

And why? Because Jesus said so. Think back to Genesis 1, the creation account. The repeated idea all the way through Genesis 1 is, then God said, and it was so.

Then God said, and it was so. And in our story, the fish have not forgotten their master's voice. They come when Jesus calls.

And Simon's response to this miracle is the right one. This is our second point. Verse 8. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord.

I am a sinful man. You see, that's what happens in the Bible when people come face to face with God. It's a response you see right throughout. In Exodus 3, when Moses meets God in the burning bush on top of the mountain, he says in the story, He hid his face because he was afraid.

[7 : 54] When Israel assembled at Mount Sinai, they trembled at the awesome holiness of God. And in the passage from Isaiah, which Mark read, I think it's on your screen, sorry.

Isaiah's vision of the Lord, he said, Woe to me, I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean, sinful lips. And that is Peter in our story as well.

Face to face with the God of Genesis 1, but also face to face with his own spiritual state. And sinners are right to tremble in the presence of a holy God.

But in Luke's gospel, Jesus has come to be a saviour, hasn't he? He's come to give us a baptism of the Holy Spirit to wash our hearts and to forgive our sins.

And I think that makes sense of his words in verse 10. Do not be afraid. You see, before Peter can be used by Jesus, he needs to be humbled and assured by him first.

[8 : 58] Jesus is mighty. Peter is weak. Jesus is holy. Peter is sinful. He's right to tremble. But Jesus says, don't be afraid.

And I think that makes Jesus a very strange fisherman. Because for some reason, therefore, he's decided to use sinners to catch other sinners.

See, instinctively, I'd want to use doctors or lawyers or other elite careers. I mean, instinctively, I'd want to use rich people, polished people, good looking people to fish in the eastern suburbs.

But for some reason, Jesus uses sinners to catch other sinners. And Peter falling before Jesus in verse 8. It's really important because it means Peter will always be aware.

That it's not about his efforts or how many people he converts or how good he is. But that Jesus has graciously decided to use him instead, a sinner, to catch other sinners.

[10 : 04] That is important for us too. Because it's not about how good we are. Nothing that we have to offer Jesus. No right mix of talent and ability here.

It's just that we're sinners. And he's decided to use sinners to catch other sinners. Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. That is the right response.

That's what should have happened. But Peter was forgiven and assured and washed up instead. Don't be afraid. If you want to be better at reaching people around you, don't focus on how attractive and polished you are.

Don't work on your speeches. Work on the realization that we're sinners who've been washed up and cleaned and graciously used by Jesus.

We should be afraid to be near him. He says, don't be. By rights, we should be condemned. But he commissions us instead. And this is our third point.

[11 : 08] Verse 10. Then Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid. From now on, you will fish for people. And notice this is not a command, but actually a promise.

You will fish for people. This is not, please, will you go out and share the gospel? Be my witnesses. They're sinners, remember? What effect can sinners possibly have on growing God's kingdom?

But this is a promise about what Jesus will do in people by his spirit and through his word. It's very similar to the commissioning at the end of Luke's gospel, that forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all the nations.

It's very similar to the beginning of Acts and the commissioning there. It's on your screen. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth. It's not, please go and be my witnesses, but a promise of how the spirit will work in them when they open their mouths.

[12 : 17] A promise of the new work that Jesus has for them. You see, I wonder if that's what this fishing miracle is. It's a massive demonstration, a visual aid, if you like, of the power of the word.

But as the word goes out, people will be summoned, not by human effort. They tried all night, remember? Couldn't catch a thing. But because Jesus says so, that they let down the nets.

The promise here, it's not for a huge catch of people. Not even Jesus caught everyone he preached. God's word isn't a book of magic spells that puts people in a trance.

The promise here is that sinners will play a vital role in Jesus' big plans for the world. The promise is that disciples are all given a new job, a higher calling, a higher purpose than the one they had in their old lives.

And I think that promise makes all the difference to Peter. Verse 11, it speaks of a change. They pulled up their boats on shore, left everything, and followed him.

[13 : 32] So they gave up one sort of fishing and took up another sort. And in principle, Peter gives up one career and takes up another.

But as soon as I say the words, in principle, it automatically takes all the weight out of the passage. You see, because I'm tempted to say this doesn't mean you have to give up one career for another.

And, you know, go and join gospel ministry. But for some of you, that's exactly what you should do. You see, fishing for some people, for me, it's a hobby.

But maybe Christianity is a hobby for you too. Leaving everything to follow Jesus. It doesn't mean a bit more of him on a Sunday. But actually a lifelong, overflowing commitment.

You might not have to leave your jobs or your families to go on mission. But do you have the same overflowing commitment that a missionary does? We're tempted to think that going into ministry, it's just for the, you know, the weird ones.

[14 : 39] The keen beans with a gift of the Gavin, you know, no social skills. But in verse 10 and 11, there's a tight connection between following Jesus and going fishing for him.

It's as if he says, if you're a follower of mine, you're automatically in the people fishing business. And that makes sense, doesn't it? How could we know about Jesus?

How could we experience his salvation in our lives but not tell that to anyone and refuse to share our faith? And I realize that that is quite a hard line.

But I just want to push you back to Peter. The more we realize how much Jesus has done for us, the less room, the less emotional space we have in here to be lazy or scared or afraid or socially awkward.

And actually, we don't even need to go to the ends of the earth to go on mission. Living in Melbourne, all the world comes to us. People from all over are in your workplaces, your classrooms, your neighborhoods.

[15 : 50] You see, maybe Jesus hasn't placed you in that job or that classroom or that neighborhood to grow your career or your bank balance or your well-being.

Maybe he has placed you where you are to give you a higher purpose, to go fishing, fishing for people. For many of us, Monday to Friday is unfulfilling and exhausting and pointless.

Here is a much higher calling. Go fishing for people. And I think that mindset is like Peter. To have a mindset like that is to leave everything behind, to follow him.

Here are some homework questions for you just while you're having lunch today. I printed it at the bottom of your handout. How will an overflowing commitment for Christ change how you go to work or school or your friend's house or even coffee with people?

If the proclamation of the gospel is the big thing Jesus is doing in the world, what is your life organized around? There is so much you can give yourself to in this city.

[17 : 08] Don't aim too low. Why not get involved with the business of people fishing? For the people around you, what if you are their best chance of hearing the gospel?

Imagine if the people around you went back to their families with the news about what Jesus has done in your life. Because you decided to open your mouth and tell them.

People always ask me, they say, when did you go into ministry? And I always say, it was about 2012 when I gave up being an accountant and started training in a church.

But actually, the truth is, it was when I first became a Christian. When I first started following Jesus. That's when he first commissioned me for fishing.

And that is your story too. There's a book, it's called The History of the Expansion of Christianity. It was written about the first 300 years of the church.

[18 : 15] And the quote that I want to share with you is on the screen. The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation.

But men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner. And spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion. See, like Peter, we'll all feel inadequate standing next to Jesus.

Depart from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. That is the right response. We're all acutely aware of our failure. Even how hopeless our attempts are.

Even when we do, be bold and share. But that's okay. Because the power to save people is in the word. It's in the Bible.

It's in the words about Jesus. It's in the words that we share. It's in the words that Jesus uses us for a higher purpose. A higher purpose than anything our old lives can offer.

[19 : 19] People fishing. That is his big mission in the world. If you're a follower of Jesus, it's a job for life. It's in the service of saving souls in the service of the king.

And that is just some of the reasons why it's worth leaving everything behind to go fishing and follow Jesus. Let me pray that we would do that.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you would use sinners like us in your service. Lord Jesus, please would we not see sharing our faith as something only for the keen beans.

But something we can do wherever we are, Monday to Friday. Thank you that you would give us a higher purpose than anything our nine to five can offer.

And please, Lord Jesus, would we be bold. Would we trust in the power of your word to save souls. Please, would we be about your business.

[20 : 26] Would we leave everything to do this. And we ask this in your name. Amen.