

5 Epiphany Year C February 9 2025

Let's go fishing

Luke 2:22-40

Jesus is at a shoreline preaching and teaching. Because of the growing crowd, Jesus got in a boat with his friend Peter and together they pushed away from the shore to continue to teach. When Jesus was done educating, he turned to Peter and told him to go out into deeper waters and put down his nets for a catch of fish. Peter informed Jesus that what he is asking him to do is futile.

Peter had been working all night. Now that Jesus was done teaching it was in the middle of the day, and it was hot. The fish had gone deep. Frankly, the nets are not going to catch anything. Yet, Peter does what he is instructed to do. Without any notice or indication, the net is so full that it nearly breaks under the volume of fish. Peter jumps into action and calls his partners for help by bringing another boat. There were so many fish that the second boat almost sank due to the weight of this unpredictable catch.

It sounds like a great story about abundance. However, there is a twist in the narrative. When Peter pulls the heavy-laden boat ashore. Peter found himself standing in the largest catch of fish he ever had. One would have thought Peter's response would be, **WOW** or Thank You or **can we do this again!** But that was not what happened. Peter was not excited. Peter attempted to dismiss Jesus due to his personal shame. Why is that?

I think Peter was overwhelmed by what he saw. Couple days earlier Peter watched Jesus heal his mother-in-law. Then Jesus demonstrated his ability to control nature by providing Peter with a catch of a lifetime. Peter realized that he could not measure up to Jesus and wanted to get away because he was ashamed of his own limits.

Josh Allen, who was recently selected as the NFL's MVP was quick to point to God as the source of his success. I appreciate his humble demeanor. However not everyone has his skill set. No matter how humble Josh Allen is, he cannot escape the fact that he is incredibly talented. Very few people in the world can do what he does every week during the NFL season. Nevertheless, there is an untold number of children and young adults who watch Josh Allen and strive to duplicate his success.

What Josh Allen said during his short acceptance speech was meant to inspire people to trust Jesus. The body of his success in the NFL was similar the bursting boats of fish. People like Josh Allen appear to be superhuman and in many respects they are. But not all NFL players have that level of success. Most players and coaches remain unknown to the rest of the world. Matter of fact it is reported that the average playing time in the NFL is a little longer than three years. Is this a kind of blessing that changes people's lives? To imply that to be a successful disciple of Jesus is to experience high level of success all the time will leave most of us frustrated and even dishearten.

Where can the church find a genuine approach to discipleship that will have a realistic chance of changing lives? The answer is found when we keep following the story of Peter's encounter with Jesus. We find that Peter discovered Jesus, not when his life was going well, but when Peter realized how underwhelming he really is. Peter failed in fishing first and when he experienced overwhelming success, he only saw his own personal flaws. It is at that point when Jesus pushes aside the shame and connects to the real person and heals them.

I was leading a workshop on evangelism, and I got to witness the power of Jesus. The exercise was a one-on-one conversation where the question would be asked "Take a minute to reflect on moments of hardship, struggle, pain, or loss in your life (one that you would be willing to share with others). And share that story with another person who would listen. Then the person listening would ask, "Where has God brought you, or at least, where do you see God in the struggle now?"

I was amazed to find out how asking a simple question how much people discovered for themselves that it was in their moments of hardship, struggles, pain, or loss that was where God was present. And the gift of having someone help them see God's hand in their lives for themselves was uplifting. What appeared to be a personal failure was an insight into a blessing. God shines the brightest when we are at our lowest. That is what happened to Peter when Jesus invited him to leave his nets and to follow him.

This is evangelism and discipleship that changes lives.

Fr. Peter Eaton, the dean of the St. John's Cathedral in Denver Colorado has this for us to consider how discipleship and evangelism can work for us today --

(quote) Here may be a way to speak about both discipleship and evangelism that can some traction for the twenty-first-century listeners. It is no real secret in our day who Jesus is. If by comparison with the Jesus of Scripture and the rich tradition of the church, popular knowledge of Jesus even among regular worshipers may be poor or inadequate, Jesus is unlikely to be a complete stranger. So how can the preacher and the community of the body of Christ make Jesus real for others and for ourselves in

ways are both true and genuinely compelling? How can the preacher take the insufficient rumors of Jesus that are already out there, use them, and build on them?

Eduard Schweizer tells us that faith "does not come as assent to statements previously preached, but as **trust in Jesus' call to try once more, contrary to all dictates of reason.**" (More recently) Rowan Williams said the same thing in a rather different way: to say that we believe in Jesus is the equivalent of saying that we have confidence in Jesus above all things; **Jesus is where we belong, the ONE whom we belong.** To know ourselves as those who belong to Jesus before we belong to anyone or anything else is the beginning of a right understanding of discipleship.

There is one final, incontrovertible truth that this passage drives home. So often the cost of discipleship does not come off the top; **it is demanded of us after we have given everything that we can give.** Jesus did not show up after a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast. He came to find these men at the end of a long working day, after backbreaking labor, and he told them to keep on working. (end quote).

To both evangelize and to become disciples of Jesus, we need to trust - go into the deep waters when it doesn't make sense, and to **follow even if we don't think we are up for the task.**

Fishing had become a way for me to follow Jesus.

It was my summer year in college. I took a lighter course load during my freshman and sophomore years, and I needed to make up for it during a summer session to graduate on time. So, my best friend and I would go fishing in the afternoons or early evenings to take a break from the course work.

We pulled up to a popular lake and found the shoreline filled with people who were fishing. They were landing fish every few minutes. My friend asked them, "What are you using?" The reply was Powerbait, which is a form of bait that the fish would smell and draw them in to the hook. So, my friend pulls out his tackle box and started to put Powerbait on his hook. He looked over to me and I was busy putting on a lure on my line. He asked me, "What are you doing?" I said, "It isn't how many fish you catch; it is how you catch them." With everything set up on my line I waded out into the water and started to cast.

My line got active, and I was landing fish just about every cast and everyone else's lines got quiet. My fishing buddy looked at me and quickly returned to his tackle box, traded out his bait fishing arrangement to lures and started to land fish himself.

I liked lure fishing because it was active. I learned how to study the water and to identify where the fish were most likely going to be located. I knew what kinds of weather conditions worked the best. I found out through experience that if I fished during the middle of day, I wasn't likely going to land anything. Later in life I moved to fly fishing. I had to learn a new technique. This took some coaching and practice. I also learned how to approach the water and how to hunt the fish. The best advice I have ever heard was this - Doug, you must go where the people are not. Meaning be prepared to walk, explore, and put forth the effort to find new places to fish. Which I did.

Some other important lessons I learned are that I must be flexible in my selection of lures and flies. In my mind I thought I knew what fish were going to be attracted to, but I was not the fish. I had to try different things to see what worked for them. I also had to settle my own body and soul down to enjoy what I was doing. If I was worked up or rushing the fish seemed to know it and stay away. When I slow down, take deep breaths, look around and get centered in the moment, the line gets active. Fishing taught me a way that I can follow Jesus and to be a disciple. I need to be flexible and try, even when I think that nothing is working.

When people encounter the Divine, the consistent response is to turn away. To hide. To be exposed to something or someone that is so great it revealed the dark and unpleasant parts of our being. So often this encounter is overwhelming. Throughout the Bible there are stories that point out that it is the broken who are quick to embrace their own shame and seek to end the encounter with God as quickly as possible. Seems like the longer they stood in the presence of Love the more they would experience the evil from within. Nobody wants to be exposed like that. As we read, Peter was no different.

Yes, Peter is correct in calling himself inadequate. For Peter, Jesus was too much to comprehend let alone even consider being in a relationship with. For Peter to be that close to Jesus and whose power to not only heal and provide Peter and his partners with a generous living was too much to accept.

What Jesus does next is consistent with who he is as the Son of God. Jesus didn't depart from Peter like he was told to do but stays put. Jesus looked at Peter and pushed aside Peter's declaration of shame.

Jesus tells Peter to do just one thing. This request is simple and only asks that Peter put forth the effort to follow him. No more and no less. Jesus doesn't even say to Peter that he is forgiven for his past grievances. Nevertheless, Peter now is a new man and accepted the invitation to follow Jesus. Peter became one of Jesus' first disciples and in time became an evangelizer for the Good News of Christ.

Jesus changed Peter's life by not focusing on Peter's darker nature but his potential to do good in the world. Peter had the courage to accept this gift of mercy and became a powerful example of what it means to be forgiven. I believe that we can be like Peter during our challenging moments of overwhelming grace. We can be bold, drop our nets, and follow Jesus and then invite others to do the same.

This is how we bring faith to life.