

Wesley United Methodist Church
January, 26, 2014
"Let's Go fishing..."
Matthew 4:18-23

In his book *In the Eye of the Storm*, Max Lucado tells about something that happened to him while he was in high school. Every year, he and his family used to go fishing during spring break. But one year, his brother and his mom couldn't go, so his dad let him invite a friend.

Max and his dad looked forward to this vacation with great anticipation. They pictured the sun shining down on them as they sat in the boat in the middle of the lake...the yank of the rod and the spin of the reel as they wrestled the bass in the boat...the smell of fish frying in a skillet over an open fire. They could hardly wait. Finally spring break arrived. They loaded the camper and set out for the lake.

They arrived at night, set up the camper and went to bed eager to get up the next morning and go fishing. But that night, a northeaster blew through. The next morning the wind was so strong they could barely open the door of the camper. The sky was gray. The lake was choppy. There was no way they could fish in that weather. "No problem," they said. They would spend the day in the camper. They had brought Monopoly and Reader's Digest. They knew a few jokes. It wasn't what they came to do, but they would make the best of it and fish the next day. So they passed the day indoors. The hours passed slowly, but they did pass. Night finally came and they crawled into their sleeping bags dreaming of fishing.

The next morning it wasn't the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice! It had gotten cold in the night. It was treacherous to get out. They tried to be cheerful. "No problem," they said. "We can play Monopoly...again. We can reread the stories in Reader's Digest. And surely we know another joke or two." But they weren't cheerful about it all.

And as the day went on, they began to get more and more irritable and edgy. It was a long day and a long night. The next morning, when they awoke to the sound of sleet hitting the roof, they didn't even pretend to be cheerful. They were flat-out grumpy. They sat in misery the whole day, their fishing equipment still unused.

The next day when it was even colder, they finally headed home. Three disgruntled fishermen. But Max Lucado says that he learned an important lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people. He writes, "When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight."

And that's true about fishing for fish and fishing for souls. When energy intended to be used outside is used outside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones... Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. I want you to let these words sink into your subconscious today. They're important for the life of this church: "When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight."

Let's face it, the sad reality is that most of us aren't concerned with fishing for men and women anymore in the same way that Christ called us to be "fishers of men." We give lip service to bringing people into the family of Christ, but like most churches, we gave up fishing long ago. We're willing to accept a fish if it leaps into the boat by itself, but we're really not all that interested in casting our nets or doing the really hard work it takes to pull them in. We would do well to listen to Max Lucado's warning: when fishermen don't fish problems arise.

You know the original story of the call of Jesus' earliest disciples: As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Matthew tells us, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men or (I will send you out to fish for people)." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going from there, he saw two brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

It's a great story, but it's not the whole story. If we turn over to Matthew 20:20-24, we read these words: Then the mother of Zebedee's sons [James and John] came to Jesus with her sons kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." You remember that little story, don't you? Notice how this passage ends: "When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. The disciples had forgotten all about fishing for people. They had already started struggling over who was the greatest in the kingdom. When fishermen don't fish, they fight. It's true.

As long as believers are working together for a common goal there is harmony and unity, but when the work stops and the talking starts so does the struggle over who's the greatest. We start worrying over who the pastor is paying attention to and who she is not. And soon the church has lost her focus.

We get upset over who is singing a solo in the choir. We get flustered if somebody new sits in OUR pew. We get indignant if somebody else gets the office that we think should have been ours. When fishermen don't fish, they fight. It is sad. We have so much to do as the body of Christ. Christ calls us to make a difference in this community. Christ wants us to show this community that we are caring people because Christ is a caring Savior. Christ wants us to model compassion, forgiveness and a passion for righting the world's wrongs. What does it say to them if we cannot get along with each other? When fishermen don't fish, they fight.

It is also true that when fishermen don't fish, they run away. There is a little story in Luke 22:56-62. It concerns the man sometimes called "the big fisherman," Simon Peter. It takes place while Jesus is being interrogated by the High Priest. A servant girl sees Simon Peter seated there in the firelight. she looks closely at him and says, "This man was with him" referring to Jesus.

But Peter denied it. "Woman, I don't know him." A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I'm not!" Peter replied. About an hour later another said, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the words the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter, the big fisherman, ran when times got tough, and how often we do the same! When we lose sight of our call, we run away from every problem! Little things make us cut and run!

I was reading about the turmoil that came to a large Baptist church in the South in the darkest days of the civil rights movement. To its credit, the church had been hosting an after-school tutoring program for children who lived in the area in government housing. One of these children was an African-American girl named Twila Fortune. She and her mother, Winifred Bryant, began to visit Sunday School and worship at the church. That ought to be a cause for rejoicing in church. Two fish, if you don't mind my using the analogy, jumped out of the water and flopped into the boat. Unfortunately, in the eyes of some, these weren't the right kind of fish. They weren't the right color and they didn't have the right social status. Nevertheless, after several years of visiting, Twila told her mother that she was ready to make her profession of faith and be baptized. Winifred contacted the pastor who visited with them in their home.

So, on a Sunday on October of 1970, Twila and Winifred walked the aisle of the First Baptist Church in this Southern city to present themselves as candidates for membership. [In the Southern Baptist Church people are accepted as members of the church on the vote of the congregation.] When they went forward Twila and Winifred were told that first Baptist was not receiving new members and that their application would have to be deferred. Over the course of the next few weeks and after many late night discussions (some lasting until two in the morning), their application for membership was presented three times for the congregation's vote. All three times they were denied membership.

After the third refusal, a layman, Dr. Byrn Williamson, stood up in the service and said he would like to talk with anyone who wanted to be part of a church who would welcome individuals like Twila and Winifred. And something stirred within that congregation. Three hundred other lay people stood with Dr. Williamson and walked out of the sanctuary of that church that day to start a new church a church where all God's people are accepted with love and appreciation. Today, 43 years later, that church is still going strong under the leadership of an outstanding pastor.

When I read that I wondered if there is anyone whom we would refuse to accept because they do not conform to our image of who is the right kind of Christian. And I wondered who among us would have the courage to stand up against the majority and declare, "That's not right." Or would we cut and run like Peter? When fishermen don't fish, they fight. And when fishermen don't fish, they run away.

There is one more thing we need to say: When fishermen don't fish, they forget. In John 21:1-3 we discover an interesting event in the lives of the disciples. It takes place after the resurrection John paints the picture for us: Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. I'm going to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Why did they catch nothing? It's because the boat was the wrong place for them to be. Jesus had told them he wanted them to be fishing for people and they were still content fishing for fish. We understand that, don't we? It's a lot more fun to fish for fish than to fish for people. And fishing for people is a whole lot harder.

Let's not forget what our primary reason for being is, and let our comfort not be more important than doing God's will.

Someone has said that there is a thin line between fishing and standing on the shore looking like an idiot. Maybe it's time we risk looking like an idiot for Christ's sake. Let's get back to our primary task reaching out and ministering to people.