

Sermon

“Go Fish”

Mark 1:14–20

24th January 2021

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Have you ever been guilty of changing the subject in the middle of a conversation or been annoyed by someone else doing it? Well, here we see the gospel writer Mark do exactly that in today's reading in verse 14.

This is known as a transitional text marking a transition from the ministry of John the Baptizer to that of Jesus. As is typical of Mark, he accomplishes this with a minimal number of words.

He simply states, *"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God."* (Mark 1:14)

This short statement immediately closes the door on John's Ministry and opens the door on the ministry of Jesus.

At first glance of this scripture, Jesus' mission does not appear all that different from John's mission.

John emphasizes the word "Repent", back in chapter 1: verse 4, we read that *"John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*, then we hear Jesus also emphasize the word "Repent", but Jesus give us a vastly different reason to why we should repent.

John proclaims that we are to repent as a way of preparing for the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus on the other hand, calls on the people to repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand, it has come near.

So, the waiting is over, God has begun a new call in the world.

Jesus makes it truly clear to the meaning of his call, to **believe** and **share** the gospel when he says, *"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men"*, which means, *"I will have you fish for people."* (Mark 1:17)

We are given no background information in Mark's Gospel regarding how quick the response was of the disciples and we are not told if Simon, Andrew, James, and John had previously heard Jesus preach and whether they had been prepared to make this life changing decision.

We are only told that Jesus saw them and called out to them and said, *"Follow me."*

And what happened? They responded.

These men seemed to understand this call to be an invitation to become disciples of Jesus, and, regardless of their understanding, or lack of it, they made a radical and immediate decision that changed their lives forever.

They left their daily work, dropping their nets and abandoned their established livelihoods.

The text makes it clear that James and John walked away from their family ties.

We cannot help but be amazed and impressed with the immediate and radical commitment that Jesus inspired in these fishermen.

So, the question is, how can we here at St Stephen's, as a church family, duplicate that. Can we here at St Stephen's have a "drop-everything kind of discipleship?"

Jesus does not call any of us to a casual discipleship.

Jesus does not call us to cheap grace either, rather He calls us to a costly discipleship.

So, in a way there is a bit of a contradiction to our faith.

On the one hand, grace is free and cost us nothing. We cannot earn it.

Ephesians 4: 7 *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."*

So, grace is free, but on the other hand, it costs us everything.

Our Lord Jesus expects us to commit all that we are and all that we have.

Maybe we can be too quick to hear the absolute gift and fail to hear the absolute demand.

We want the grace yet too often ignore the cost of discipleship.

These men, these disciples, immediately knew that Jesus did not invite them to become spectators.

He makes this clear when he says, *"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men to fish for people."* (Mark 1:17)

Jesus used wonderful terminology to make this vitally important kind of discipleship clear to them.

He picked up on the images of their own vocations. *"I will make you fish for people."*

Fishing for a living in the 1st century was a lot different from the fishing most of us know of today,

And there are lessons to be learned from this great analogy of Jesus.

When we understand Jesus words, we will know that the Christian Church is actually the world's largest fishing club, and we all are members.

When I read this scripture to prepare this message, I somehow thought of the card game called "Go Fish". It is a game where you ask your opponent to Go Fish. So I thought what a great theme for this message, "Go Fish".

Our commission by Christ is to Go Fish!

To bring men and women into the kingdom of God.

Many churches unfortunately sit around reminiscing about the days when their boats were full of fresh fish.

Sadly, forgetting that those days were the days when the main purpose of their church was fishing, to reach others for Christ.

Many have simply forgotten how to fish and for some they have forgotten how to show or share unexpected grace.

So, what does it mean to go fishing? with Jesus?

First, you are expected to enjoy fishing.

It is not to be something that fills you with fear, frustration, or dread.

The fishing analogy can help us to experience the joy when lives are changed by the power of God's love.

But before we can enjoy it, we must get out in our world, and go fish.

Fishing is telling your story, how Jesus brought you from here (Hand Down) to Here (Hand up)

When we begin fishing, then and only then, can we really understand the joy of the catch and work on becoming better fishers of men.

To go fishing can put fear into people, yet others are filled with anticipation of a great catch.

But all followers of Christ need to get their nets wet before they can understand what it really means to Go fish.

We all need to learn to enjoy sharing our stories, and then we will begin to enjoy fishing by fishing.

We also need to go where the fish are.

The reason many fishermen have empty nets or hooks is they do not go where the fish are.

Too many people try to fish by sitting in the boat with no fishing rod or net and expect the fish to come to them.

It just does not work that way, we must go to the fish, we must go, we must Go Fish!

Now the fishermen in Jesus day usually used a net, which is where I believe the valuable lessons is in this verse. Casting the net to the unsaved is easy for us as Christians to comprehend.

When we speak of fishing today, we speak of a fishing line with a hook and some type of bait suitable for the fish they are trying to catch.

If you are fishing for trout you would be using some type of fly, if you are fishing out on your boat, you would use something like squid or trevally or such like.

And that is where I believe this analogy can be misunderstood.

We are not trying to trick people, to snare or trap them so, we can feed on them as you would with a nice, tasty fish, instead, we must find what it is that interests others and use that as a means of encouraging them to come and see.

We are not trying to lure people to their death. but to lead them to a new life in Jesus Christ.

We must meet people at **their** needs by showing grace or extending friendship and to be someone who genuinely cares.

This could be as simple as inviting them to an Alpha course, and as it happens, we have one starting here soon, information on the Alpha course is in the kit sheet, and there is a sign-up sheet on the table in the foyer, or please see me after the service if you want more information.

It is taking the time to build a new relationship or to deepen a relationship with those that God has placed in your life, and he will, he will place people in your life who need grace.

Jesus called his disciples to: (1) Follow him. (2) And Go fish.

We are quick to hear the first part to follow him, but not the second. To Go Fish.

This story, a bit long but I believe it is important and will help illustrate our calling by Jesus.

Story: *On a dangerous England seacoast, where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station.*

The building was just a hut and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and were committed to go out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who had previously been saved from a shipwreck, and various others who lived in the surrounding area, chose to become associated with the little lifesaving station. They all were willing to give of their time, their money, and their effort to support the work.

New boats were bought, and new crews were trained, and the little life-saving station grew.

Some of the members of the station were unhappy that the building was so little, crude and poorly equipped.

They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge for those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

In addition, the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members.

They decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired professional life-boat crews to do this work.

The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club's décor, and there was a symbolic lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and a variety of nationalities.

The beautiful new club was in chaos.

So, the property committee immediately had a temporary shower erected outside the club, where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next club meeting, there was a split in the club membership.

Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities because it was a hindrance to the normal social life of the club.

Some members though, insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose, for they were still called a "life-saving station".

But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast, which is just what they did.

As the years went by, this new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old.

It too, evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded further down the coast.

History continued to repeat itself, and I am told if you visit that seacoast today, you will find several exclusive clubs along the shore.

Sadly, far too many Churches have become this way, I believe that there are well over 20 churches here on the Hibiscus Coast.

It is as if we think that Jesus did not really mean it when he said, "Go fish."

If we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, if we are going to advance to be a church family that is mature in the faith we must "Go Fish".

We must have a heart for those that are shipwrecked.

If we are conformed to the image of Christ how can we not reach out to those who are drowning!

How can we not: Go Fish?

There is an old Christian fable that tells of Jesus encounter with the angels as he re-entered Heaven.

As the angels talked with him, Gabriel, noticed that Jesus bore the marks of the cross, and being curious, said to Jesus:

"Master, you must have suffered terribly for those people down there."

"There was some suffering," Jesus said.

"And", said Gabriel, "Do all of them know how you loved them and what you did for them?"

"Oh no," said Jesus, "Not yet."

"Just a few in Palestine know."

"So, what have you done," said Gabriel, "to let everyone know?"

Jesus said, "I have asked Peter, James, and John and a few others to tell others about me, and the others to tell yet others and others, until the world has heard what has been done."

Gabriel was less than convinced that this was a workable plan.

He said to Jesus: "What if Peter, James, and John and these others get tired and fail?"

What would happen if many years from now people just do not tell others about what you have done? Are there other plans? Is there a back-up strategy?"

Jesus replied: "I have made no other plans. I am counting on them!"

That same call Jesus extended to Peter, Andrew, James, and John; he extends to all who have received His call to salvation.

We all must remember just who we are in Christ.

We all are Fishers of People.

I am convinced the opposite of Love is not Hate, it is Fear.

Is it fear that is keeping you from stepping out and saving the drowning?

Is it fear that is keeping you from loving the lost and showing grace?

If this is you, remember our Lord's words: *"Fear Not"! I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus shares with disciples and with us, that we, here at St Stephen's, should love one another just as Christ loves each one of us here today.

That love, of sharing your life in Christ, makes Fishing so much easier.

That love will give us the desire to introduce others to our Lord and Saviour.

That love gives us the ability to see others through God's eyes and to seek opportunities to show unexpected grace.

It is time to Go fish.

Jesus is calling, Jesus is counting on all who call him both Saviour and Lord to love and to share his grace.

Jesus is calling and counting on his disciples, on his followers, on each of us here today to obey his word.

Family of St Stephen's, it's time to Go Fish.

Amen