



January 27, 2008

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Matthew 4:12-23

“Gone Fishing with Jesus Lately?”

How many of you consider fishing a hobby?

How many of you used to or still fish fairly often?

How many of you have been fishing at least one time in your life?

FISHING is almost a UNIVERSAL experience!

I used to fish some as a kid. My brother loved to fish. I would help him tie flies. I was never very good at fly-fishing- I couldn't get the hang of casting with a fly-fishing rod. But I was pretty good at holding the thread and feathers for my brother when he tied flies! My favorite fish to catch and eat was trout. I was amazed to learn how different lures and bait were needed to catch different fish---- in different kinds, depths, clarity and temperatures of the water. This varied in different parts of the country. It was science and geography and playing in the water all rolled into one!

I learned that fishing was tricky and a lot more study and knowledge were needed than initially meets the eye. But I loved catching those gorgeous rainbow trout. The process was uniquely satisfying and pleasurable.

Jesus was very wise to use a fishing metaphor to describe the Christian life to his followers. Most everyone was familiar with fishing. The metaphor was effective because “fishing for people”, like ALL fishing requires study, thought, patience, and recognition of differences among “fish”. Christian “fishing” is meant to be guided by Jesus Christ, just as I needed a mentor like my brother to teach me about

fishing for trout. And “fishing for people” can become a process that we enjoy, just as we may love fishing for fish.

“Fishing with Jesus” is often called “Evangelism” or “winning people to Christ”. This does not involve the kind of “winning” that happens at the fair when you pop a balloon with a dart and win a teddy bear. Unfortunately Christians sometimes approach it that way.

Evangelism involves the kind of “winning” implied when we say, “that little kid sure has a winning smile”.... And in about 45 seconds she has won your heart completely.

We “win people to Christ” by being winsome with Christ’s love flowing through us and out to others. And friends, this should happen every day- as a natural part of our lives.

How do we do this? What does it look like? We often think evangelism requires us to rush up to people with brochures or tracts and bombard them with words about Jesus. We picture lots of TALK.

Evangelism INCLUDES talk, but two things come first:

- 1) LOVE. You must genuinely care about the person you and Jesus are fishing for.

The second step that needs to precede TALK about Jesus is to

- 2) LIVE like Jesus.

Let’s consider these.

LOVE is absolutely basic and essential in faithful evangelism. God calls us to SEE people as Jesus sees them. Look beneath the crust. Love people where they are. If you will only continue to care about this person IF he accepts Christ, or names his faith in exactly the way you think he should, FORGET IT! That’s an ego-trip game and other people figure it out right away. JESUS DIED FOR US BEFORE we said “yes” to him. He asks us to love each other just as he has loved us. That’s the first step when we fish with Jesus: LOVE. Genuinely care about Jesus’ fish.

The second step that requires us to LIVE like Jesus is sometimes called “WALK the TALK.” It’s being guided by the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) question--- not just asking it, but actually DOING what he’d do. It’s “putting your money

where your mouth is”—and that’s LITERALLY of course, as well as figuratively. How we use our money is evangelism. Others notice, and wonder why we do what we do. The fish get interested!!

Once we love and live like Jesus, then comes TALK about Jesus. Rebecca Manley Pippert, in her book *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World* provides some great suggestions. Much of this could be summed up “be yourself”.

Acknowledge your feelings and fears when you talk about faith to others. You can say things like: “If I’m coming on too strong, please tell me.” Let others know you aren’t perfect- that you make mistakes and don’t understand everything about God or religion. Let people know you are completely human.

Talk to non-Christians the same way you talk to Christians. Ask Christ to erase any “us” and “them” thinking in your mind and heart.

Do not assume your non-Christian friends will not be interested in your spiritual side. Pippert gives an example she shared once: “We had an interesting study at my church this week, on how Jesus related to women. He was RADICAL in his attitude—completely challenging his religious community and culture.” This opened a conversation with several interested people.

Share what brings you joy, what has helped you in a tough time, how God is acting in your life. This is called “exposing” your faith rather than “imposing” your faith. Imposing is never God’s will, and of course it’s impossible. (Did you ever try to force a fish to swallow a worm?)

Friends, following Jesus means fishing for people. Evangelism is NOT AN OPTION.

We’re either repelling people by our lives, actions and attitudes, or we’re drawing them towards us.

We’re either inspiring interest and warming hearts, or we’re hurting others and pushing them away.

Watch the FISH. They will show you how you are impacting them. Jesus will study them with you and offer suggestions. Drink in his love and it will spill out to others. Don’t be afraid. Flawed as we all are, we are capable of great love and “winsome-ness”. Fishing takes practice!! Follow the Master and watch to see how God is glorified! Amen.