

**Who Ya Gonna Call?
Mark 1: 14-20
Don Lincoln**

Many of you – if you’ve heard me preach over the years – know I like to fish. While my favorite is fly-fishing for trout in mountain streams, I’ve fished for bass with a spinning rod in neighborhood ponds, trolled for tuna in the Gulf Stream, and stood in the ocean surf and heaved a baited, weighted line to see what I can yank from the waves.

So – it’s no surprise I’ve always loved Jesus’ use of the fishing metaphor for “catching” people. If Peter, Andrew, James and John had been farmers, perhaps Jesus would’ve used planting or harvesting language. If they had owned vineyards, perhaps he would’ve spoken about producing a good vintage. But they were fishermen. So fishing it was.

Obviously, if you push the image too far, you could speak about fooling people with some kind of spiritual bait; bait that looks really good, but has some kind of hook in it. That’s actually what cults have been doing for decades. Suck you in with promises and turn you into blind followers. And we’ve all heard of evangelists preaching hellfire and damnation in order to scare people into their nets.

Those are concerns my colleague Debie Thomas reflects on in her essay on this invitation from Jesus to fish for people and the fishing metaphor it stirs in us. So she chooses to focus on the specificity of the call to these fisherman – four men who happen to know their own particular trade and context and setting very well. And then invites us to make the application in our own lives. She writes this:

You and I learn we’re not called to evangelize in the abstract. We’re not invited to proclaim the good news “in general,” with no regard for how and where our words might land. We’re not invited to peddle cheap or careless language. We’re not commissioned to cajole, entrap, manipulate, bully or ensnare. Instead, you and I are called to pay close and loving attention to the people around us. We’re called to “**know the water.**” We’re called to live, move, speak, and “fish” in ways that are invitational, hospitable, respectful, and mutually life-giving.¹

And we should do so – each of us – from our own unique position and with our own particular gifts.

This past Tuesday, Westminster leaders – as we do every year at this time – heard statements of faith from the new deacons and elders we ordained and installed earlier this morning. And each faith journey was unique. One mentioned two older women at church who had been living expressions of the love of Christ when he was young.

Another mentioned a significant pastor along the way from another congregation; another recalled Bible study in Young Life and how significant the leaders were; and still another recalled third grade Bibles, Vacation Bible School and our own Rockabout ministry led by Sue Spotts.

Who was it that fished for you? For me, it was Lewe Mizelle, who taught me to sing “The Old Rugged Cross” in third grade Sunday School. It was Hu Auburn, a Youth Pastor who invited me to play tennis with him and talked easily about his faith along the way.

It was Tom Skinner, the chaplain of the Washington Redskins who preached in a Presbyterian church that I and about 500 other students in Cincinnati attended for an evening preaching mission when I was age 18. It was an event that transformed my life. And.....it was surely two parents who daily, quietly, modeled the way of Christ for me.

All of them. Fishing. Coming alongside me with their own particular gifts; living their faith in their own context; each extending in their own way an invitation to a way of living and believing that connected me to God in Jesus Christ.

So – with thanksgiving to our new officers – and in tribute to Sue Spotts, who has exemplified this very life-giving witness for far more than her 16 years on Westminster’s staff – remember this friends:

If you and I embody the loving vision of God’s kingdom and the profound beauty and hope of Christ in our own lives, and are willing to come alongside others sharing the possibility of that same beauty and hope in their lives....

.....and if you and I do so respectfully and lovingly, with whatever unique gifts we have been given, at home, at work, at play – when we do that kind of fishing, God promises to do the rest!

God will enable the vision **that you and I live** to be a life-giving, soul-catching experience for others. So let’s go fishing – even today!

May it be so! AMEN.

1. Debie Thomas, www.JourneyWithJesus.net essay, “*I Will Make;*” January 17, 2021.