

SERMON: Transferable Skills

TEXT: Mark 1:14-20

I'm not a fisherman. I'm not even a fisherwoman. Or a fisher-person. Never have been; never will be. I tried fishing once when I was maybe seven or eight years old. I even caught a little sunfish. But when I pulled it out of the water, it started flopping around and it was slimy and cold to the touch, so I screamed. That was the beginning and the end of my fishing career.

But I've observed other fishermen a number of times in my life. I used to spend time with friends at their cabin in Northern Minnesota. When they went fishing, I sometimes went along for the boat ride to relax and enjoy the lake. I always said I didn't need a fishing pole in my hand to do that. But I learned a bit about fishing by watching.

Of course, we all know that some of the first people Jesus called to be his disciples were fishermen. And we all know that

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers OF men." Or "I will make you fish for people." And they followed immediately.

As far as we know, Jesus was a stranger to them. So, what was it about him that compelled them to follow immediately? I think it was the way Jesus worded that invitation. He invited them to do something they understood, with just a small change: "I will make you fish *for people*."

Fishing was their life. So, while Jesus may have been a stranger, and the job description he provided them was certainly not complete, they trusted him and followed because he was speaking their language. He offered them something familiar but with an interesting twist. Fishing for people? Maybe they followed simply out of curiosity.

The opportunity Jesus offered was different enough to be exciting, but not so different that it would be scary or

overwhelming. Clearly, in the task of “fishing for people” their skills would be transferable. They already know how to fish.

In fact, there are several characteristics common to fishermen that would qualify them to fish for people.

First and foremost, it seems to me that before you go fishing you need to take a double dose of PATIENCE - a virtue that few of us possess in this age of instant gratification. Most of us have probably prayed this prayer, or at least would understand the sentiment: “Lord, give me patience, and I need it right now.” We know all too well that God’s time is not our time. The hardest thing about trusting God is that it requires a lot of waiting on God. But it’s not the kind of waiting where you just put your feet up and fall asleep with the fishing pole in your hand. It’s an active waiting, where you’re constantly throwing the line out and reeling it back in again. You’re constantly watching the water for movement or some other sign that the fish are near and hungry.

Now, if you're fishing with a net, when the net's not in the water, you're mending it. Which brings me to the next quality of a good fisherman and disciple of Jesus. PERSEVERANCE. To keep on keeping on, to not give up, to be willing to get up every morning and start all over again.

I had a classmate in seminary who was probably thirty-something and she suffered from a severe case of chronic fatigue syndrome. She was sick more often than she was well; she missed class more often than she attended; and she even had to take a leave of absence from school, at least once. I don't know how many years it took her to finish seminary, but she finally graduated. I marveled at her perseverance and applauded her for not giving up. I don't know that I would have been so dedicated to God's call.

WATCHFULNESS is another quality that I see in fishermen and find necessary for disciples and followers. The most successful fishing involves having your eyes and ears open. You

need to be watching and listening to discover where others are having success. You need to be watching for signs in nature, in the water and in the sky. You need to be paying attention to what works and what doesn't. Someone once said, "Opportunities, many times, are so small that we glimpse them not, and yet they are often the seeds of great enterprises. Opportunities are also everywhere and so you must always let your hook be hanging. When you least expect it, a great fish will swim by." (Og Mandino)

Finally, as disciples who are called to fish for people, we need DISCIPLINE. One of the reasons I'll never be a fisherman is that there's not a fish in the world that could make me get out of bed at four o'clock in the morning! I'm not that disciplined. But when you look at the word itself, it's easy to see that being a disciple means being disciplined. Fishermen typically like to practice, practice, practice.

We understand this concept whenever it's related to athletics or music, academics or a hobby. We understand that you have to work hard every day, sometimes for hours a day. We understand that if you really want to be good at something, you need to make it one of your top priorities. But why is it that we don't understand that when it comes to living our faith? Somehow we think that you can just believe in Jesus and decide you're going to follow him and that's all that's necessary. Not so. Being a faithful and true disciple of Jesus today is just like anything else. You need to practice, practice, practice.

Most often this story of Jesus calling the fishermen is focused on the idea of "fishing for people" and we think of it in terms of evangelism only. But every aspect of following him and practicing our faith involves these qualities of patience, perseverance, watchfulness, and discipline. In prayer, we need patience in order to "wait on the Lord" and perseverance to "pray unceasingly." In Bible Study, we need watchfulness to recognize God's living word to us and discipline to continue lifelong learning.

In service and fellowship, in being a member of the church, we need patience in working with people, perseverance in growing the church, watchfulness in serving the needs in our community, and discipline in giving our time, talent, and treasure.

Whether you're a fisherman or not, we all have TRANSFERABLE SKILLS. We all have gifts and talents that can be useful as we follow Jesus and strive to do his work both in the church and outside of the church. We are all called to be disciples, and that requires practice, practice, practice. That's why we're here. To be reminded that we do have what it takes and to support one another in the work. May we do it to the glory of God!

AMEN.