

Life's Too Short... Not to Fish Matthew 4:19

Well, the first fishing experience I can recall was with my Grandpa on my Dad's side. I was just a little shaver and I don't know where we went. But I do remember some particulars. I remember the pond we were at had a dock that went out about 10 or 12 feet into the water. Grandpa had purchased a small, Styrofoam container of worms, a cane pole and a red and white bobber. But the most exciting thing I remember was this: (Grandpa baited the hook) every time I put that worm in the water, a fish bit it. And I'm not exaggerating it. I was pulling fish out as fast as Grandpa could bait the hook! I'm not kidding! Looking back at it, I think he had as much fun as I did.

Now I'm not much of a fisherman today, in fact I haven't been fishing in years. But there was another time, when I was a teenager, when I got the bug from a neighbor of ours named Jerry Zap. You'll hear more about him later.

But there are some passionate people out there about fishing. I came across a technique of fishing a few years ago that I didn't know existed.

YouTube video: might talk over the video some, explaining that this is called "noodling"]

You know, when I think about fishing, the picture that comes to my mind is a man in hip waders on a quiet lake in the mountains... fly fishing. That just seems so peaceful and serene to me.

But what you're about to see would be on the opposite side of the spectrum as fly fishing...

Now, you can see from that, that some people are really passionate for fishing

If you were to take time to read through the gospels, you'd find that a lot of the life and ministry of Jesus centered around major fishing towns, a prominent fishing lake, and people who made their living fishing. As a matter of fact, 7 of the 12 guys he challenged to be his ministry companions – the Bible calls them disciples – were fishermen.

And today, we're going to see how Jesus turned fishing into a whole new occupation, because he knew, that life was too short not to fish. I want you to find your Bibles and turn with me to **Matthew chapter 4.**

Today's message is directed at three groups. The first group is those who **need to hear hope**. You're carrying the weight of your past and have yet to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Through our time, today, you'll discover how much you mean to God and how much you matter to us here at Grace.

The second group are those of you who have **responded to hope**. You've made a clear decision to be a Christ-follower and you're seeing God transforming your life ... and your telling people about the hope you've discovered. Hopefully this message will encourage you to keep on keeping on.

The third group is those of you who have stepped over the line of faith, but for some reason, the passion isn't there to see others enjoy the same relationship you have with God. For some reason, you're not a "hope caster." I trust this message will spur you on and help you develop a passion for being a hope caster.

OK, so by now, if you're looking up the passage, you're there. If you didn't bring your Bible or don't have one, look at it with me on the screen. Here are the words of Jesus that we're going to look at today.

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and will make you fishers of men."

That's it. Now what's he talking about? Fishers of men? Well, what's behind this statement is Jesus' heart. Jesus has a heart for people. He had a passion for people. And if you were to follow the life and times of Jesus and his followers, you'd quickly find out that more than anything else, Jesus was teaching his followers – his disciples – how to develop a passion to give people hope.

So that's the question I want us to address today. How do I develop a passion to give people hope? Well, the first order of business for developing a passion for people is to...

Acquaint yourself with Jesus

As I said earlier, my first real introduction to fishing was when I was a teenager. We had a neighbor named Jerry Zap. Jerry is a fun-loving kind of guy. And he took an interest in me and befriended me.

One of the funniest things about Jerry was his dog, Skipper, but most of the time he called him "Dumbo," because Jerry could get him to do the dumbest things. He would take Skipper out in the yard, point to a tree and say, "Get 'em boy." And there would be nothing there, but Skipper would bark and bark and bark up the tree... at nothing.

Well Jerry just did things with me. We installed a storm door on his front house. He introduced me to fried mushrooms... just different things.

But it was during those times that I learned about his love for fishing. He talked about his various trips, his gear. He just liked to talk fishing. I learned about fishing and became interested in it because I knew Jerry.

Well, the same was true for the disciples. Before Jesus makes this statement to follow him and he would make them fishers of men, the disciples had already spent time with him – probably several months.

And during that time they not only saw many miraculous and larger-than-life stuff, but they captured his heart for people. They had witnessed and experienced his driving passion to reveal God's plan and truth to people.

- They saw him challenge wrong ideas and misconceptions about who God is and spirituality.

- They saw him risk his reputation to a woman with her own reputation, who had become an outcast in her village and had become downcast in her spirit.
- They saw his heart for people at a wedding reception. When the host of the party ran out of wine for the guests, Jesus protected his honor by turning ordinary water into wine.
- They had heard him preach with passion for people to abandon their bankrupt and shallow lives and to embrace the abundant life provided by God.
- And they were amazed as people – crowds of people – would gather to see him and hear him speak.

Developing a passion to give hope to people begins with knowing Jesus. The Bible tells us that

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

In other words, the kind of love that gives hope, is not in us. It comes from God himself. And just like the disciples, who captured Jesus’ passion for people because they were with him, we, too, must be with Jesus ourselves.

That’s why we stress a daily time learning from the Scriptures about who God is and what he has for our lives. Having regular times of prayer where you pour out your heart to God, not only for yourself, but for others. Spending time with God is crucial to capture God’s heart for people.

But some of you have never begun a relationship with God. You need to know that the reason Jesus came was to give you hope.

As you begin this new year you can have a fresh start. Jesus can stand ready to relieve you of the burdens of your past. God created you to have and enjoy a relationship with him. But, unfortunately, most people never get to know God in the way God intended. Now, why is that?

Well, the problem is that a barrier builds between us and God when we try to run our lives ourselves and ignore God’s right, as our creator, to lead us according to his infinite wisdom. And the Bible calls this attitude of wanting to control our own lives, sin. And sin breaks our relationship with God and separates us from God. And we become distanced from Him. What’s more, this attitude of wanting to control our own lives is the source of every other problem in our lives.

*The Bible says, “Your [sins] have separated you from God.”
(Isaiah 59:2)*

And the only way to have the barrier removed is to be forgiven. We just celebrated Christmas. We celebrated this truth:

“In the beginning was Jesus, he was with God and he was God. And Jesus became flesh (Christmas!) and lived among us.”

And the reason Jesus came was to pay the penalty for sinning against a holy God – death. When I violate God’s standards, there’s

a penalty. And because I have violated the holy standards of God, the penalty is death. So because of God's love for us and in God's wisdom, here's what happened.

When Jesus died, he died in our place. The Bible says that *"all we like sheep have gone astray, but God laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

When Jesus died, he removed the sin barrier. And forgiveness is ours for the asking. And if we trust in the fact that when Jesus died for me, he died for my sin, then I can be forgiven by God.

And you can enjoy a relationship with God and have your sins forgiven by asking God to forgive you because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can tell God right now, "Lord, please forgive me of my sin. Please give me a fresh start. I'm counting on the death and the resurrection of Jesus alone for my forgiveness. I ask you to control my life. Today, I turn from my way and accept your way for my life."

If that's what you just told God, right now or at the end of the service I want you to mark the response on your Communication Card that says...

To give others hope, you have to have found it yourself. Jesus said,

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." John 17:3

Jesus is passionate about fishing... fishing for men. He's passionate about people finding hope. He's passionate about those of us who know him personally connecting with other people to communicate the life-changing message of hope in Him. And if I'm going to be someone with like passion, I have to increase my acquaintance with who Jesus is. Next, I must...

Accept the invitation of Jesus

Ex. That's what Jerry Zap did with me. Eventually he got to the point where he invited me to go fishing with him. So one day, I did. Very early one summer, Saturday morning we loaded up his green, '73 Ford Pinto wagon with fishing gear and food, and we headed for lake... bass fishing. He loved to fish for bass.

If I wanted to try something new in my life, if I wanted to abandon my ordinary routine on Saturdays as a young teenager, then I would have to accept his invitation. And I did.

Jesus told the disciples by the lake that day, *"Follow me..."*

He was calling them to abandon their ordinary occupations and accompany him full-time. He challenged them to abandon the ordinary, in order to embrace the extra-ordinary.

Think about your life. How ordinary is it. Well, Jesus is challenging you, just like the disciples by the lake that day, to upgrade. To trade in the old model of life for a new one.

Ex. Everyone likes to upgrade. Who wouldn't upgrade from their old Playstation to a Playstation 3, complete with realistic graphics, hard drive, internet connectivity, and Blu-Ray player?

Who wouldn't upgrade from a Yugo to a Lexus? Who wouldn't upgrade from the old console TV with 480p resolution to a new flatscreen with 1080p resolution? Everyone would if given the opportunity.

Jesus is challenging us to upgrade – to follow him. But upgrading always costs you something. You've got to give up something to gain something better.

Elsewhere Jesus described what it means to be a follower like this. He said,

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

You might want to underline the words “deny himself.” That's key. If you want to develop a passion to bring people hope, it can't be all about you.

Ex. In an interview, comedian Jerry Seinfeld told what he called his favorite show business story. It's about the Glenn Miller band. Their bus broke down in the middle of nowhere and they were late for a gig

so the band members were forced to walk a long distance into town through snow, ice and mud carrying their instruments. While trudging through a field, they came across a farmhouse. Inside they could see a family sitting by the fire, husband reading the paper, wife knitting, children playing on the floor with their toys: a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting. One of the musician shuddered and said to another, "How do people *live* like that?"

Though there's nothing wrong with a Rockwellian lifestyle, we need to aspire for something more. If we're not getting our hands dirty, if we're not roughing it a little bit, if we're not trudging through ice or snow, so to speak, in order to get the job done — then we're asking too little of ourselves.

Sometimes my life has the ease and comfort of a Rockwell painting, and I treasure those moments. But when we have a passion for bringing people hope, it's almost always far from Rockwellian.

Being available for people who are grieving is not always convenient. Being a blessing to the under-resourced and the jobless and the under-employed of our community is filled with challenges. Giving up my money for children or families around the world without the basic necessities can be challenging to my finances. Bringing hope to the hopeless is not a Rockwellian venture.

Here's something we need to understand. Here's a major mistake many Christ-followers make in the church. Most of us see the Gospel as “God and me” instead of seeing the Gospel as “God and the world.” Most of us see the Gospel as God and me. We think, “It's all about me – what makes me look good, what floats my boat, what helps me, what feeds me. It's all about me and my deal and my

growth and my maturity, me, me, me, my, my, my. God and me. But it's not about God and me. Biblical Christianity is about God and the world. "For God so loved the world..."

If we are not white hot with passion about bringing hope to those who don't yet have it, then we're missing Christianity.

Christianity is unique. It separates itself from all other world religions because Jesus tells me when I get outside of myself and think about you, that's when my needs are met.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, that's my purpose. That's why I'm here.

Are you with me? Life's too short not to develop a passion for bringing people hope. What else is Jesus challenging me to do here? He's challenging me to...

Adopt the vision of Jesus

Jerry not only took me fishing, but he tried to instill a little vision for fishing, too. I remember going camping with him, and we were with a larger group so we were travelling in two vehicles. He was in one, I was riding in the other. And Jerry loved his CB. So both cars had CB radios and, apparently, when you're using a CB you have to have a call name of some sort. It's not like hey, Dave. It's more like "Breaker 1-9" and then you would say the call name.

Well I didn't have a call name. So on the spot, Jerry made one up for me. He said, "Breaker 1-9, are you there, Bass-Buster." Bass-Buster? Yeah, he was casting a little vision that I was a legitimate fisherman, though you probably couldn't prove it by my success.

Well, Jesus casts a little vision for the disciples. He doesn't just say, "Follow me." He says, "Follow me..."

"... and I will make you fishers of men."

He was saying, "Guys, you follow me, and I'll make sure you have significant, even eternal influence on others. But you've got to trade in your nets, give up your smelly occupation, and follow me."

Jesus frequently cast vision for the need for people who have hope, to tell others the message of hope. On one occasion he said,

"I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)

He's saying, "The opportunity is now!"

Ex. I'll tell you someone who's bought into this vision – hook, line and sinker (pun intended) – Me! I have. Part of what made Julie and I stick here 20 years ago was this vision of being used by God to bring hope to others. It shook us out of our me-orientation and made us focus on others. And our lives have never been the same.

There's nothing quite as exhilarating as getting out of bed in the morning, going back into the world, and know why. Enthusiasm is derived from the certainty that for this I was born, and I am doing it! It's the thrilling knowledge that I am fulfilling God's intended purpose for me.

Jesus is challenging us – he's challenging you – to buy into the vision that if you follow him and focus on others, He will use you to make a difference – an eternal difference – in the lives of others.

And the good news about that is that Grace is here to help. And that's the fourth principle I want us to look at. If you want to develop a passion to give people hope...

Ally with the church

When I first learned to bass fish with Jerry. He taught me about casting, where to cast, the kind of lure to use. I didn't just go out there by myself. He taught me and coached me. The same is true if you're becoming a fisher of men – a hope caster. The Bible says that God even purposed it that way. It says...

"It was [Jesus] who gave some... to prepare God's people for works of service..." (Ephesians 4:11-12)

What that's saying is that God has given the church certain individuals to train you in all aspects of being a follower of Jesus Christ – most especially in the area of God's passion for people. So take advantage of them.

Each of you has your own sphere of influence – your own body of water. And God wants you to cast hope into your body of water, by how you live and by what you talk about. And God has provided you with plenty of opportunities for training right here to learn how to bring a message of hope to those in your pond.

You're in one of them now. One of our most effective training times for faith is right here on Sunday mornings. Every week you hear from the Scriptures a study about a different aspect of Christ followership, and you have an outline that summarizes the most salient points. These are great conversation starters with others who need to hear about the hope of Christ. I used one of them with my family just last week. What's more, you can invite people to join you here on Sunday morning, so they, too, can enjoy what you're benefitting from.

Beginning in March, we'll restart our emphasis on Second Saturdays. The second Saturday of each month, we gather together to go into our community, and as people of hope, serve people in a way that demonstrates the love of Christ.

The same is true of Give A Christmas. We provided that opportunity not only to be blessing to people in our community, but we wanted you to have the opportunity to extend the love and hope of Christ to someone who needs hope.

We just concluded another year season of Upward Basketball and Cheerleading. This ministry is a great opportunity to convey the message of hope in Christ through your service and your

conversations. Every week coaches share a short lesson on godly living, culminating at the end of the season a discussion about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We're always in need for volunteers for that ministry.

Our children's ministries and student ministries both provide ample opportunities to be equipped in developing a passion for people and the message of hope in Christ.

There are opportunities here every week, where you can partner with others to help kindle a passion for communicating the hope found in Jesus Christ with others.

What a powerful purpose. "I'll make you fishers of men. I want to use you to bring hope to people living in a hopeless world." But notice that Jesus didn't say, "I'll make you catchers of men." Jesus does the catching. All he tells us to do is fish. Just fish. Just care enough to pray for people and communicate hope to people.

So now you have to answer the question:

Conclusion

Will you respond to Jesus' call to give hope to people?