

**The Message for Jan 22, 2012**

**Mark 1:14-20**

*Look Around*

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Look around, what do you see?

Mark Twain loved to go fishing, but he hated catching fish. He went fishing to relax. Catching fish interfered with his relaxation time, since he had to take the fish off the hook and do something with it. When he wanted to relax and do nothing, people thought he was being lazy. But if he went fishing he could relax all he wanted. People would see him sitting by the river and they would say, "Look, he's fishing, don't bother him." So Mark Twain had the perfect solution. He would take a fishing rod with a bobber tied to the end of the fishing line, but no hook on it. He would cast the bobber in the water and sit back on the bank and relax. And people wouldn't bother him nor would they think he was being lazy either.

I wonder how many of us are kind of like Mark Twain. The fishing line is in the water with a bobber, but there is no hook on the end of the line. There is "fishing" going on but no intention of catching any fish. When it comes to fishing Jesus had something very specific in mind. He said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people." The word "make" here can be translated as "equip," or "empower" or "given the resources" so we can go fishing for people.

I Googled the word "fishing" and got over 87 million hits. I came across a web blog for Elaine Wheat. I have no idea who Elaine Wheat is but this is what she wrote on her web blog.

*Today, as I was driving down the highway, a sign on a church caught my eye. It wasn't because of the deeply spiritual message, but because it had the word "fish" in it. It was so moving that I wanted to share it.*

*The sign said "Be ye Fishers of Men. If you catch them, He will clean them." As I traveled down the road, I thought about that sign. It was a short-and-sweet, tried-and-true message. It was to the point and perfectly positive in nature.*

*I should have left it alone and just totally affirmed it. But sometimes, my mind just goes silly on me, and I think in surprising ways. Here is what this fisherman's brain came up with:*

*"Be ye Fishers of Men. If you don't, you can't catch them, He can't clean them, but the Devil can surely still fry them."*

We are in a Worship Series called, "Over the Fence." We are considering how we are called by Christ to reach over the fence into the lives of those around us with God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness. Our faith is the guide.

I am convinced that every one of us is motivated either by fear or by faith. I see it all the time. Both fear and faith can shape how we see the people around us too. If fear motivates us then we keep our distance from people. If faith motivates us well... then... anything is possible.

Today we are talking about going fishing. We're talking about the "e" word. We Lutherans tend to avoid the "e" word – *evangelism*. The sound of that word can send shivers up and down the spine of even the most devoted Lutheran. I wonder why?

Maybe we need to redefine evangelism here this morning. Evangelism is nothing more and nothing less than developing a relationship with someone because of our relationship with Jesus. It's about our relationship with others.

Last week we learned how important it is for us to get and stay connected with Jesus using the metaphor of an oxygen mask. We can't live without the rich oxygen of God's grace flowing into our lives through Jesus and we can't give to others what we don't have.

Why is it so important that we evangelize? Why is it so important that we go fishing for people? Why reach over the fence into the lives of our neighbors? Here's why?

A recent Gallup Poll reveals that the fastest-growing category of religious affiliation in America is "No Affiliation." Fewer and fewer Americans are reporting any connection to a church. The United States is one of the fastest-growing mission fields in the world. Fifty years ago, we sent evangelists to Africa. Today, Africa is sending evangelists here to the United States. Sadly 72% of Americans do not know their neighbors and most Christians don't have any friends outside of the church. It's a great time to be equipped and go fishing the Jesus way.

So let me ask you, when you see people what do you see?

I read an article that describes how we tend to see people in one of three ways: as scenery, as objects, or as people.

**First, we see people as scenery.** Or better yet, we really don't see them at all. We ignore them. Step into an elevator with people that you don't know, and you'll experience this. We might as well have paper cut-outs of people standing there with us. Over the Christmas holidays we spent a family day in Philly to see the Liberty Bell. At one point we were on elevator with strangers. I did the unthinkable. I started talking with them. They looked at me as if I wasn't supposed to do that. They wanted to be seen as scenery and it appeared they wanted to see us that way too.

**Second, we see people as objects.** We see them as a means to an end. The waitress is merely a means of taking our order and bringing our food. The cashier is merely a means of taking our money in exchange for whatever we buy. The delivery guy

is merely a means of bringing our packages to our door. The garbage guy is simply a means to take away the packages when we are done with them. If you were to ask any of these people how they tend to get treated by others, they would probably tell you they are treated, “Less than human.”

The other week I met with a pastor friend of mine for lunch at the Country Fare. The waitress came over to take our order. You could tell she was having one of those days. I looked her in the eyes and asked, “How is your day going?” She looked at me with a shock-filled-delight and thankfulness that I would take a moment and connect with her in a personal way.

**Third, we see people as people.** They have a name, and we know it. They have a story, and we’ve heard it. They have a life, and we share it. They have a reason for being, and we respect it.

Jesus sees people and their potential. He sees people not as scenery and not as objects. Jesus sees people as people, people that God created for a purpose. Jesus invites people – all peoples into a life-giving relationship with him – giving them a new identity and a new purpose for his kingdom work

Listen to our reading from Mark’s Gospel...

**(Read Text)**

There is common and uncommon in this story. On the beach by the Sea of Galilee it’s common to see fishermen casting their nets. Jesus’ invitation saying “Follow me” is a common invitation from rabbi to a student. It was uncommon for fishermen to follow a rabbi and uncommon to go fishing for people. Their response is even more uncommon: they immediately drop their nets and follow Jesus. We’re not told why, or what they are thinking. Point is -- there is power in Jesus’ call to discipleship.

Pastor Rob Bell suggests that a rabbi only extended such a call to “the best of the best,” and the fact that these men are working the family trade meant they didn’t make the cut. Bell suggests that these fishermen respond immediately because they did not want to miss out on such an honor, or the extraordinary opportunity, or the possibility of going places. So they followed Jesus. I might add, they had no idea what they were saying yes to.

There are three things going on in this story I invite you to consider.

**First,** Jesus finds the disciples in the midst of an ordinary day, doing ordinary things, in an ordinary place. Jesus works in and through the ordinary of our lives.

**Second,** Jesus calls ordinary people to be his disciples. He doesn’t look for the best of the best or those who have it all together. He looks for those who are willing to

answer his call, turning their lives around – following him, learning from him, growing with him, and living with him.

**Third**, the call from Jesus gives every follower a new identity and new purpose to go fishing for people, to do extraordinary things for Jesus and his kingdom.

Jesus is calling us to reach over the fence with God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness. He is calling us to go fishing for people. Will you? It begins with our view of the people around us. Are they scenery, objects, or people through whom Jesus is at work in the world?

Look around, what do you see? Amen.