

Reading: Matthew 4: 12 – 23

Sermon: A Lesson in Fishing

(Slide 1 'Gone Fishing')

I thought about inviting along a fisherman today to talk to us because in some ways, I'm out of my depth but I spoke to one on the phone instead!

I don't know anything about fly fishing except that the flies are often very attractive and very bright and you use different flies for different types of fish but apparently if you wanted to catch pike, you would use a fly which looked like a mouse. If you wanted to catch trout, you would use a fly which looked like a mayfly.

I don't know much about bait either except that the bait you use depends on what you are trying to catch. Trout wouldn't like crab or squid or mackerel and you wouldn't use worms or maggots or sweetcorn if you were sea fishing.

The bait you use also depends on where you are fishing. If you are fishing in fresh water or in rivers, you would use different bait from what you would use if you were fishing in salt water or in the open sea.

So your target group of fish and your location both need to be taken into consideration when deciding what bait to use. The bait needs to match what the fish would normally eat in their environment.

There endeth the first lesson in fishing! All I need now is a rod and a pair of waders!

The only other thing I am going to say is that fishing bait is any substance which is used to attract and catch fish, and in addition to the traditional types of bait, some fisherman have also started to use electronic lures which is not something that would have been an option for past generations.

In our Scripture reading today, Jesus catches his first two fish: Peter and his brother, Andrew. At once, they left their nets and followed him.

(Slide 2) 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him.

That got me thinking the other night. What did Jesus do that bought about that response from the fishermen? They gave up their livelihood and they left their father behind. What was the bait? What enticed them to take Jesus' hook?

The only thing I can think of from what is said in that verse, is that Jesus spoke to Peter and Andrew in their own language. He spoke about fish. He

called them to follow and to fish for people. He didn't use the language of conversion. In this instance, he didn't talk about repentance, about forgiveness, about salvation, about faith. He talked about fishing. Jesus spoke their language. He was on their wave length and that has got to be the starting point for us as we start trying to reach others and trying to encourage others to follow Jesus. We need to speak their language. We need to use stories which people understand, understand in the sense that they can relate to the stories and to the examples that we use. We need to use what people are used to in their own environment.

The other thing I noticed about that story was that when Jesus came along, the fishermen were preparing their nets.

(Slide 3) They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets.

A tangled up net, a net full of holes, a net that was not prepared for throwing over the side, was just not going to do the job it was meant to do. What we see in the fishermen, Peter and Andrew, is commitment. They are prepared to put in the ground work to achieve a catch. They have a limited time to fish when they are out in the boat so they need to be ready. They need to know that they have done everything in their power to make the night's fishing worthwhile. If they catch nothing, at least they know that they have done their best.

(Slide 4) I will send you out to fish for people.

Jesus said he would send Peter and Andrew out to fish for people. Their preparation was getting to know Jesus. They were with him, it would seem, more or less, round the clock once they started to follow him and when they went out to fish for people, they told them all that they had seen and heard. They spoke of their own experiences and weren't afraid to challenge or to stand up for what they believed.

The gospel did not spread and the Church did not grow through the disciples saying what people wanted to hear. That being said, there was something attracted people to following Jesus and to respond later to the fishermen as they began fishing for people. What was the bait? Whatever it was, it was worth biting.

In this 21st Century, we are still called to follow Jesus and we are still sent out to fish for people, although now many people think it doesn't matter what people believe and that it doesn't even matter if we believe, and in many

ways we go along with that because we don't want to offend, and we don't to be judged by Joe Public and above all we want to be liked. We want to be accepted but you know, in some ways, that's like fishing without bait. No fish is ever going to bite a bare hook or at least it is extremely unlikely.

We need some kind of bait to attract people, the right kind of bait for the people we want to reel in. The same bait will not work for every age group or every group of people but we need to think long and hard about what baits will be the most attractive. We also need to think long and hard about where we are going to cast our line to reach the people we want. I don't mean by that that we want Mrs X but not Mr Y or vice versa. By the people we want, I mean anyone who has not heard the gospel, anyone who has fallen away from Church and lost sight of God, anyone who is in need of companionship, anyone who is lonely or sad, anyone whom Jesus loves.

As the girls showed us last week on their freeze, God needs U and I, you and me to work together. It's not all down to the minister. It's not all down to me. Jesus sent the disciples out, ordinary fishermen, to fish for people.

Everyone of us is called to fish for people but we need to know how to do that. It may be that your role is simply to take an interest in the person sitting next to you in the pew or the person who isn't. We leave people sitting on their own, new people, when they sit in a pew by themselves. Maybe your role is to speak to them, to make them feel welcome. How are you going to get to know them if you don't go near them?

The bait will never be bitten if it never reaches beyond your pew, or your bit of your pew. Friendship might be the bait that some people need, friendship and being made to feel that they are worthwhile, that they are of value, that they are special.

For others the bait might be the electronic bait. It might be modern methods, modern songs, modern ways of doing things. That might not attract some of us but it may be that we need to use that bait to attract other fish, bait that we wouldn't bite ourselves but which others might.

That can all be a bit scary. It can feel much safer to stick to what we know, to stick to the familiar, but if Peter and Andrew and others had stuck with what they knew, if they had stuck with fishing from their boat, where would we be?

We, and others before us, needed people to take a risk to attract us and to share the gospel with us, and others today need us to take the same risk to attract them. Others need us to use different types of bait to draw them in.

If we don't try, they won't bite. If we try, they might still not bite but at least we will have tried. We will have done our best and that is all God asks of

us, that we follow his Son and that we share his message in the best way we can, following the example that He has set for us.