

Epiphany 2B, 2012

Text: Mark 1:14-20

Title: Two ways to Fish

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Today, Jesus invites the disciples to go fishing.

And He invites you to come along, too.

There are two basic ways to fish. I know this is an oversimplification, but there are two basic approaches when it comes to fishing.

This first way to fish, the way that you probably think of first, is to use a line and a hook.

The idea behind this way of fishing is to attract the fish to your hook. There are many different ways to do this. You can use bait- from worms to minnows or other fish, and use that attract the fish. You can use a special lure or something that looks like food, maybe a fly or frog or another fish, and hope to fool the fish into biting. You might use a spinner or something else shiny to attract the fish's attention.

But at the end of the day, you need the fish to bite. You need the fish to make a decision that whatever you put on the hook is attractive and worth a try. If you use the wrong bait for the wrong fish, no matter how hard you try, you won't catch any,

The second way to fish is with a net.

The idea behind this way of fishing is to go and get the fish, rather than trying to attract them. You don't bother with bait, you just go looking for the most likely spot to find them and cast your net.

The only problem with this way of fishing is that you often get more than you're fishing for. You can get all sorts of other sea creatures, and maybe even garbage in your net.

But it's a more proactive way to fish. You do all the work. The fish are caught whether they're hungry or not. It's not based on their decision whether or not to bite.

So which way of fishing is Jesus talking about here? And what sort of fishing should be doing as a church?

Most churches try to fish the first way. They try to find something attractive that will lure people in and get them to bite. They find out what people are looking for and then they give it to them.

They find just the right music to lure people in. They try to develop programs to attract people. They throw out any and all bait they can find to get people in the door.

And then it's ultimately the people's choice if they want to be a part of it or not. If they don't like the bait, or if they think they can find something shinier or tastier elsewhere, then they move on.

This is not the way that Jesus teaches his disciples to fish. This may be the way that businesses try to attract customers, but it's not the way that Jesus does things. He doesn't teach His disciples to throw something out there and hope people bite. That's not the way they're used to fishing.

The disciples are used to fishing with nets. This is how the folks of Galilee fished. Notice what Simon and Andrew, what James and John are doing when Jesus calls them. Simon and Andrew are there with their nets. James and John were mending their nets.

The disciples fished with nets. They would go out at night or early in the morning when the fish came to shallow water to feed. They would cast their nets into the sea and pull them back into the boat, hopefully, full of fish.

This is the same way that Jesus will have them fish for men. Not by attracting men to them with some sort of bait or lure, but by going out and catching men in their nets.

How does this work? What is the net used to catch people for Jesus?

The net is the preaching of God's Word, law and Gospel.

Notice what Jesus does, how He starts His ministry. Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Jesus catches people by His preaching.

There are two parts to preaching, there are two parts to Jesus' message. The first is the law. This is Jesus' call to repent.

The message of the prophets always began with a call to repent. This was Jonah's message to the people of Nineveh. Repent.

We all need to repent and change our ways. We are all sinful. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We have all sinned in thought, word and deed.

There's no escaping this net. This net catches everyone in the whole world. And there's no way to wriggle out of it.

But that's just the first part of the message. After the law comes the gospel. After the call to repent comes the good news.

Your sins are forgiven. That catches everyone as well, but in a good way. This is where the analogy breaks down.

Normally when fish are caught, they die. When people are caught by Jesus, however, they are given life. They are brought out of this world to something better.

This better place is the Kingdom of God. It's where Jesus reigns as king. It begins in the boat of the church. In the midst of the raging wind and waves of this world, the boat, the church is a safe place, like the ark of Noah that preserved the lives of God's people from death.

Eventually the boat will come to the shore, the new heavens and the new earth.

As a church, then, we continue to fish up until the end. This doesn't mean trying anything and everything to get people in through those doors. What it means is going out through those doors with the net of God's Word. Fishing Jesus' way means taking His Word out into the world where all the fish are. Fishing Jesus' way means preaching the law, that we are all dead in our sins and trespasses, and then preaching the gospel, that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake.

Yes, there will be times when our nets come up empty. But we keep fishing, keep doing what Jesus has sent us to do, preaching His Word- Law and Gospel, and trusting that He will be working through us to fill His boat with fish.