

They Left Their Nets

Richard “Dick” Maas spent the better part of his life fishing. He and Janet are with the Lord now, but while on earth, Dick was the proud owner of a tugboat.

His father, Bert was a commercial fisherman who captained a boat which was named “Fearless II.” So, if you are boy who grows up with a Dad who captains a boat called Fearless, you start to get a philosophy of life. Dick followed in the path of his father and worked on a commercial fishing tug.

Now, imagine with me that Jesus came to Sheboygan about 2000 years later. Let’s imagine Jesus is walking along the harbor shores of Lake Michigan, walking among the commercial fishing boats, and Jesus sees Dick, Bert and Norma’s boy. Dick loved fishing. He loved being on the water. But now, here comes Jesus.

Dick is cleaning the boat, working on the nets, telling stories about his pony and the rest of his zoo of animals. Jesus walks up to Dick and says, Richard (as I imagine Jesus might use a formal name to commence a calling); ‘Richard’, Jesus says, ‘Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Whatever that meant to Dick, whatever that means at all, the invitation is so powerful that Dick

lays down his nets and gives up his fishing career. He heads up the shore with Jesus.

A bit further on Jesus and Dick come upon another fishing boat with a father and two sons in it. Jesus says to the brothers, Scott and John, "Follow me." They immediately get up out of the boat and start walking with Jesus, not even looking back at their father, Jerry, who has this mighty befuddled look on his face as he sits there, watching the future of the Warmus fishing business walk away. "When will I ever get to retire," he muses?

At the end of the shoreline there is a telephone booth (this being an historically accurate artifact from when Dick walked this earth), and Dick calls his wife, Janet, 'Janet the Patient', and he tells her, "Dear, can you walk the pony tonight? I have decided to follow Jesus, and, oh, by the way, I left the keys in the boat. Give Karel a kiss. Love you! Don't wait up."

Scott and John call their Mom (in my story they are still young unmarried men who paint houses in the summer after they get done fishing in the morning), and they tell her, "Mom, can you go to the harbor and pick-up Dad? Last we saw he was sitting in his boat looking befuddled. We have decided to follow Jesus. We will call when we are in town. Love you and tell Dad we love him too!"

You find that story humorous, I hope, because, well, it would never happen, right? We think such a tale preposterous because it would never happen like that. Not today.

Do you think it happened something like that, though, 2000 years ago? Do you find this Bible story in which the call of Jesus to his first disciples is so powerful that they lay down their nets, they leave their dad sitting in the boat, all to follow this Jesus, do you find it preposterous? Some old fish tale? If you believe the story happened like that 2000 years ago, but you think it wouldn't happen like that to Dick and Scott and John, and poor Jerry, then I wonder, what changed? Who changed? Jesus? Or us?

You don't think that these fishermen, Simon and Andrew, James and John, that they had any clue what it meant to go fish for people do you? How could they? Yet they followed. That is the power of the call of Jesus. That is the life-changing power of the invitation of Jesus to his disciples.

The point of Jesus calling people who were commercial fishermen is that they knew nothing about being disciples. They just knew the voice of Jesus. They weren't seminary students; they had probably never had much schooling at all, except in the school of learning how hard it is to catch fish, how hard you have to

work at it, how persistent you need to be, how you need to go where the fish are because fish don't read the signs that say, 'fish wanted, jump in the net here.'

(That reminds me of a saying I learned from my dad, fishing, 'fishy, fishy in the brook, come and bite upon my hook.' It wasn't until years later I learned that this was not an actual thing.)

The point of the story for us today is that we all have nets, and we all need to decide on some course of action that the world says is preposterous. "No one would do that." That is the Christian life in a nutshell. Who agrees to serve on a Consistory, giving up nights and weekends? People like Scott and Toni, Connie and Marc. People like these four who heard Jesus call them and they had to lay down whatever was in their nets and follow Jesus to this moment.

I would like you to think about your call to these offices of Elder and Deacon as a personal invitation from Jesus to follow him into some new work. That inevitably means that you need to lay down some net. You need to free up your hands, your time, your attention.

I have a list of all of the people who have served with me since 2009. It is a list of people who probably wondered often what they got themselves into. But

they served and still serve, because once ordained always ordained, once called always called.

God doesn't call everyone to full-time service in God's kingdom. And that is a good thing. God doesn't call everyone to part-time service, or even to be set apart by ordination. These are unique callings for specific tasks that do require lifetime commitments to serve in the Kingdom of God and thus commitments which no one should take with less than totally serious hearts and minds.

But Jesus does call everyone, including you, to follow him. Following Jesus always requires some net to be laid down, some boat to walk away from. And if you think you can answer the call of Jesus to discipleship without making any changes in your life, without any sacrifice of your time, without any change in your priorities, then you have not heard the lesson today's Scripture is teaching.

The call to these offices we fill today is important, very important. But, the call, or the invitation, that Jesus gave you to your work is very important too. Someone needs to assemble chairs and move furniture for our guests to have better seating. Someone needs to prepare and serve meals for the poor and homeless among us. Someone needs to write cards to the lonely. You get the

point: Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of life. Fishing for people is a team activity, and each role is critical.

I think that we all hear Jesus calling...we all just heard it read here this morning. The question for each of us is whether our hearts are willing to say 'yes.' The easy way out of this dilemma is to say, "Jesus called? I had my phone on silent." Or "Jesus called? I was too busy with (fill in the blank) ...school; work; family; sports." (Um, watching the Packers is a built-in excuse this afternoon, though.)

These are the things that we keep in our nets that we just find it almost impossible to lay down so that we can follow Jesus. Jesus isn't saying you should abandon your obligations to provide for your families, to take care of your health, or even to abandon time enjoying creation or Sabbath rest. Jesus is simply saying, will you make priority number one to follow me where I lead you?

As one writer puts it, "Jesus does not just ask (us) to add one more task to (our) busy lives. He calls (us) to a new way of being."

"We perhaps think Jesus means: "I will make you fish" gives us one more activity to work into our datebooks. ('Right Jesus, fish for people. How about every fourth

Monday? Can anyone else do fourth Mondays?') What Jesus calls us to is a whole new life."

Jesus is asking you to engage in a transaction of the heart, because until you are following Jesus with your heart the rest of your service is just going through the motions. It might be easier, actually, if Jesus just asked you to add him to your calendar or checkbook. But that's not where Jesus starts. Jesus calls you to follow him with your heart first, and then your feet and hands and voice will follow.

That's what Jesus is calling you to do today. To lay down whatever is such a heavy burden, or such a precious commodity, that you would rather hold onto that net than lay it down to follow Jesus with a renewed commitment.

Jesus offers you today the opportunity to fill your net with the catch of a lifetime, one that will bring you joy in your life as you never imagined it. The words of Jesus are not an argument, they are not a command; they are an invitation: "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?"

Big Idea: When you hear Jesus call your name, lay aside anything that prevents your heart, mind and body from following the path Jesus asks you to walk.

That story about Dick and Scott and John, and poor Jerry, it wouldn't ever happen today, would it? Not just like that. But each of them, each one, did hear the call of Jesus, and each, in their own way, laid down some net to follow Jesus. Each of them, like each of you, made a sacrifice of praise.



No, the story didn't happen just like I told it, I suppose, but it does happen something like that on a thousand shorelines in a thousand languages in an invitation extended to a thousand souls.

It might be happening to you right now, mightn't it?

Amen.