

Sermon: "Have You Been Caught Yet?"

Focus: Christ's call to the disciples is symbolic of God's call to all of us to respond to God's love for us and to follow it into new life.

Function: To encourage the listener to respond to God's love and to be caught over and over by that love.

### **Naming Present Action:**

I have a question for you this morning: "How much does God love you?"

Several decades ago, four young philosophers were asked to write a song for the first live global TV broadcast -- a song with a simple message for the whole world. And what those four young philosophers came up with summed up for at least one generation what life is all about with one simple statement: "All you need is love."

I know that many of us, if asked to give one word to sum up the totality of the gospel, perhaps the whole Bible, we would say it is about "love."

And I like to imagine that if we were able to ask God, "What do you want most for us to do: be righteous, repent of our sins, convert the heathens, pray? God would answer: "The one thing I really want you to do is love. Love each other. Love yourself. If you can figure that out, the rest will take care of itself."

And yet, when I asked you to think about how much God loves you, did anybody find it hard to answer that question? Some of us couldn't stop talking and some of us maybe had trouble thinking of anything to say.

We really have to stop and think "Hmmm. What could God love about me? What about me is even lovable?"

Let's be honest. Sometimes we don't even find ourselves very lovable, so the idea that God could find us lovable...even likable, can seem like a stretch.

It's a strange phenomenon that I have observed. Maybe you have too. There are many people outside the church who have no use for the church, no use really for organized faith, yet they are convinced that God loves them, implicitly. And there are many people inside the church, perhaps even life-long Christians who question God's love for them, question their worthiness to receive God's love.

And yet the gospel is clear. God loves you, just as you are. God is love. If you encounter love, God is there. If you encounter God, love is present. And that love for you and me is unconditional.

And it seems to me that if we can't accept that, if we can't get that right, how can we get the rest of Christianity right? And yet, we still struggle with this simple but audacious claim: God loves you, abundantly and intimately.

So what does this have to do with today's text, a text that doesn't even mention God, let alone God's love for you and me?

What does any of this have to do with a text that seems to be about "fishing for people?" Good question.

Because if this text is about fishing for people - code word for evangelizing others - then it is something many of us aren't comfortable with, let alone see as good news.

Let's be honest. Many of us here, if we get right down to it, want nothing to do with "fishing for people." Either we come from a good liberal/progressive background where talking about your faith is just something you don't do in polite company...or the idea of being thought of as someone who forces their religion onto others is so repugnant to us that we don't talk about religion at all unless the other person brings up the topic-- and even then we say as little as possible.

Others of us have come from evangelical/fundamentalist backgrounds where we were expected to impose a very particular brand of Christianity onto others -- mostly non-believers -- and it was a brand of Christianity that was so judgmental, so condemning that we're cautious about sharing our faith with others simply to avoid ever again being associated with that negative strain of the faith.

Some of us, of course, just see faith as private and personal and the idea of sharing it with others publicly would never even occur to us.

And then some of us -- well, some of us are just too unique to be defined in any one category.

So here is the good news. I don't think this text is about fishing for others -- about spreading the gospel to others. That's another text, another sermon for another day.

No, it's not a text about fishing for others. It is a text about getting caught. About the disciples getting caught. And how does Jesus catch them?

In this passage the disciples are the ones doing the physical fishing, to be sure. But it is God who is doing the spiritual fishing. And God seems to be using some amazingly effective bait. Because all Jesus has to do is call to these guys and they are caught "hook, line and sinker" and ready to follow him wherever he wants to take them.

How did Jesus "catch them?" Was he just so charismatic? Such a persuasive orator? Did they spot the halo on his head? I don't think any of these is the real answer. The gospel is clear: When people encountered Jesus, spent time with him, developed a relationship with him, they experienced, perhaps for the first time, the overwhelming, abundant, unconditional love of God. Because that is how Jesus loved them. And they couldn't help but be caught by it, drop everything, and follow him.

So the question remains: Have we been caught? To answer that is to wonder how we know God's love. We know it differently and it comes to us in different ways. For some it comes in a moment of silence or meditation. For others, during a walk in the park, while listening to beautiful music or reading a book that opens your mind to new possibilities. For some of us it will come when we are alone and for others when they are in the presence of loved ones.

But the truth of scripture -- what it claims over and over from the first story in Genesis-- is that God never stops trying to catch us. God fishes for us persistently. God is trying to catch us with love all the time, if we are open to the experience.

I think it is not a one time thing.

It can happen any time. Any place. Any where.

I think that God is fishing all the time.

In fact, somebody in this room may be being caught right now as we speak.

But it takes an openness to getting caught. To being open to God in your midst.

But the example of Jesus seems to be that the best way to get caught...to know God's love, is to share it with others, to give it to others freely and wastefully. We know God's love for ourselves more deeply the more we are willing to share it with each other.

And here is the funny thing. When we allow ourselves to be caught -- really caught by the love, the compassion, the grace, the unrelenting justice of God -- we probably won't be able to keep from going out and sharing that with others -- to help them get caught too.

We have so much to offer as a church. Such an amazing, deep understanding of God as the source of love who cares unconditionally for other people.

Such a challenging view of God as one who wants us to care deeply about issues of justice and equality.

Such an amazing understanding of a God who has caught many of us in a net of grace and abundant love.

How can we keep that a secret? How can we not want to go share that love of God with others?

So what do you say. Anyone want to go fishing this week?

As far as bait, I suggest we stick with the wisdom of those four philosophers from Liverpool: All you need is love.

Let us pray.