

Casting Nets for Jesus

Matt. 4:18-22

11/10/19

“Chu queniki menti kech. Wa ca taal tin pash.” Did you get that? Hmm.

Apparently, we have no native Maya speakers here today. How about Spanish?

“Pescadores yo os hare si venis tras mi.” No? Well, maybe it’s my accent!

When we run Vacation Bible School on our Mexico mission trips, we sing these words with the kids in Maya and Spanish as well as in English.

Some of you may know the song in English, “I will make you fishers of men if you follow me!”

You may also recognize that these words form the basis for our Stewardship Campaign Theme, “Casting nets for Jesus.” The idea comes from Matthew, the first book in the New Testament. Jesus was just beginning his ministry. Like most itinerant rabbis of the time, he recruited some people to follow him and assist with his ministry, while they learned from him. Here is his first attempt at recruiting found in Matt. 4. ¹⁸As *(Jesus) walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and*

he called them. ²²*Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.* (Matt. 4:18-22)

Other gospels make it clear that this is not the first encounter between Jesus and these men. Jesus was already preaching and teaching and healing, and had made his home in Capernaum, where these four men lived. He invited them to follow him, as disciples or learners. Notice that it was a costly decision for them- leaving a paying occupation and likely causing tensions in their families. Jesus plays off their occupation as fishermen, saying he will make them fish for people, meaning that they will be reaching out to others on Jesus' behalf. That was very important, because it was the only way people would learn about Jesus and his teaching as there was no printed word, radio, TV, internet, or social media. All of the early followers of Jesus saw it as their responsibility to tell others about him, which continued through the book of Acts as the early church was established.

In fact, the responsibility to tell the others the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ was seen as an essential part of being a Christian throughout most of church history. And it still is in most parts of the world today. Unfortunately, as our society began to see itself as a Christian society, many Christians and their churches lost the skill and motivation to share their faith with others. Today, I'm guessing that few of you here this

morning feel comfortable talking about matters of faith with others outside the church. And that's unfortunate, because our country is seeing a rapid overall decline in church attendance, so the only way many people will hear the good news is if someone they know tells them or invites them to come to church where they can hear it. As in fishing, we need to go where the fish are, since they're not coming to us!

In a Barna survey conducted last year, Americans gave several reasons for why they don't have spiritual conversations more often:

- **Religious conversations always seem to create tensions or arguments (28%)**

In a Peanuts comic strip, Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "I would have made a great evangelist!"

"Is that so?" responds Charlie Brown.

"Yes," says Lucy, "I convinced that boy in front of me in school that my religion is better than his religion."

"Well, how did you do that?" asks Charlie Brown.

Lucy replies, "I hit him over the head with my lunch box!"

Some approaches to sharing our faith do lead to tensions

and arguments, but I don't think they have to! Here are two more reasons people gave for not having spiritual conversations more often.

- **I'm put off by how religion has been politicized**
- **I don't know enough to talk about religious or spiritual topics**

You may personally have other barriers to sharing your faith, including being a private or introverted person or having few unchurched friends. Clearly, there are a number of barriers to sharing the faith today, but none of them is insurmountable, and none of them releases us from our responsibility and privilege to do so! And I think there are some ways of sharing the faith that almost anyone can learn to use successfully.

So, to quote from Steven Bonsey's book, A Shy Person's Guide to the Practice of Evangelism, "Let's pretend that you are someone who might be willing, in theory, at some point, possibly, to consider maybe doing something that, while not 'evangelism-type' evangelism, still could be in some way construed as a sort of sharing of hope. Kind of." Here are a few ideas or approaches that you might try that may overcome some of the barriers you feel to sharing your faith.

Almost anyone can **invite** someone to come to church with them. It could be a family member, friend, work colleague, waitress, bank teller, or cashier. You could invite them to worship or to another activity, like the

painting mixer we just held where they can meet some of our people and begin to feel comfortable being here. One recent survey found that about 25% of people who don't go to church said they would probably go if someone invited them! So invite them! Or,

#2 Offer to **pray** for someone. When someone tells you about a hardship they are going through, let them know that you will be praying for them. Or, offer to pray with them on the spot! One of our small groups meets in a restaurant where they routinely ask the waitress how they can pray for her when they give thanks for their meal. For many people, this is an easy thing to offer. And very few people will reject an offer to pray for them! So offer!

Another way to share your faith is to **witness** to the ways God is at work in your life. So, if someone is struggling with something that you have also struggled with- grieving, a serious health problem, a divorce- you can ask, "Do you know what was helpful to me when I went through that?" Then talk about how prayer or your church family helped you during that time. You don't have to oversell it, but most of you have found the presence of God to be a real help and comfort during difficult times. Why keep that to yourself?

Finally, you may recall that in a recent sermon I talked about some spiritual needs that most everyone grapples with- guilt, justifying our

existence, security, finding a sense of purpose, etc. When those kinds of needs come up in conversation, you can talk about how the gospel comes to bear on them. For example, if someone is struggling with guilt, remembering the grace and mercy of God may be a great comfort. When we're struggling to feel valued, remembering that we're made in the image of God can give us both a sense of value and meaning. You get the idea. Talk about how the good news makes a difference in the big questions and concerns of life.

Let's review these simple ideas for casting nets. Invite someone to church. Offer to pray for someone. Testify to God's work in your life. Apply the gospel to life's big questions and challenges. Notice that none of these approaches is likely to lead to tensions or arguments! I'm hoping you can imagine yourself doing one or more of these things. Look for opportunities to do so! And remember: God is already at work in the life of the person with whom you are sharing your faith!

OK. Now some of you, especially members of the Stewardship Committee, are wondering how on earth all of this ties into the matter of giving, especially financial giving. That's a fair question, so I'll try to answer it as I close! Giving to GPC furthers the work of casting nets for Jesus. Many of you were here when Ben and Emily Okello were with us a few weeks ago to thank us for our support of their orphanage in Kenya. I'm

guessing most of you would like to be part of their work in caring for their 80+ orphans. Your giving to GPC supports their work. And the work of the Gerlachs in Thailand and the Castros in Honduras and the work of our mission trips in Honduras and Mexico.

Want something closer to home? Your giving supports our South Dakota, South Carolina, and youth Appalachian mission trips, as well as the Gettysburg CARES homeless shelter and ministry, the Ruth's Harvest program that feeds local students, the Adams County Jail ministry, Habitat for Humanity, the Young Life student ministry, etc. It also supports the work of growing Christian children, youth, and adults here at GPC through our Christian Education and Adult Discipleship Ministries. It supports our wonderful music ministries which proclaim the good news musically each Sunday. And, it supports pastoral care outreach to those in our church family and community who are in special need.

In short, your giving supports the biblical ministry of casting nets in a wide variety of ways that you couldn't do as an individual. Now we don't talk about money very often, but I want you to know that we really need your financial support at this time. As we're losing many of our older members, it is affecting our giving. We're farther behind on our budget at this point of the year than we have ever been before. I'm not sure if we'll be able to catch up or not. But if we are not able to raise the pledges to

support the proposed budget for next year, we'll have to make cuts. And the only places to get significant amounts of money is in the areas of missions or staff. And cuts in either of those areas would be very painful. So please pray this week about how God would have you support the work of casting nets through the ministry of GPC. I believe that the resources to accomplish this work are here, if we're willing to give with generosity.