



Matthew 4:18-22
 Personal Jesus
 Going Fishing

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Today we are beginning a new series of messages looking at the personal relationship and interaction that Jesus had with a number of different individuals. And as we look at these conversations and interactions, and how he touched and changed people's lives, we'll learn about what it means for us to each be in relationship with Jesus as well.

And this morning we're looking at Jesus' invitation to follow him as his disciple. **And one of the first things we see in his invitation is that being a disciple of Jesus is not only about what we receive from it: there's a significant piece about helping others to be His disciple, too.** In fact, that's the only thing Jesus says to these guys about what they'll get out of following him, as Jesus takes the familiar activity of fishing, and uses it for a metaphor for leading others to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Now my guess is we're all pretty familiar with fishing. How many of you have ever been fishing? Great...most all of you have. Now: How many of you like fishing?...Not quite so many. When I was a kid, I loved to go fishing, and I would often ask my dad to take me fishing. Now that I'm the one taking kids fishing, I don't like it so well. But it's still pretty fun. When I was a kid, every summer we went on vacation for a couple weeks at my grandparents cabin on Lake Coeur d' Alene (ID), and I'd ask my dad and my grandfather to take me fishing. And many mornings, we'd get up early and go out. Looking back on that, I have no idea why I was so excited to go fishing at like 6 in the morning. If I'm getting up at 6 go on a boat now, it's to go waterskiing and wakeboarding. And I'd probably rather just stay in bed. Anyway, the fishing I usually did with my dad and grandpa was trolling. It wasn't terribly exciting. You just drop your line over board of a slowly moving boat and wait for a fish to bite. But when the fish did bite and stay on, it was fun to reel in. In fact, that was the best part about fishing: **Fishing is much more exciting when you're catching fish.**

Now, if you've spent much time fishing, you are aware that there are some basic things you need to know in order to successfully catch fish. 1. You have to have the right equipment. 2. You have to know where the fish are. 3. You

have to have bait that's attractive to them.

Now, before we go any further, I want to touch on one thing first, and this is particularly for any here this morning who aren't in a relationship with Jesus. So if you don't know much about Jesus, listen particularly closely for a moment. If this metaphor of "fishing for people" sounds creepy (it does to me!) or like there's a trick involved – because let's be honest, when fishing for fish, there is a trick involved and it doesn't end well for the fish – and so if the fishing metaphor doesn't seem so great, it's important to understand that Jesus is motivated by love to invite people to follow Him. Jesus is important and matters and makes a difference. He sees himself that way, and those who follow Jesus see him that way...and he can make a positive difference in your life, too. And he's motivated by love to work through his disciples to reach out to others and invite them to follow Jesus. Your interaction with Christians may not have always felt like it was motivated by love...and we don't always get it right, for sure – I'm sure I've messed it up more than once in my life. But it's clear from even a quick reading of the biographies of Jesus that the motivation Jesus has to invite people to follow him is love.

So, with that understanding of why Jesus invites us to "fish for people," let's talk about fishing. **The first thing a person needs in order to catch fish is to have the right equipment.** What are some of the pieces of equipment that you need in order to go fishing? (Pole, hook, bobber, weight, bait, boat, waders, float tube, etc.) The equipment you need varies, depending on the kind of fishing you're doing. If you're going fly fishing you need to have a certain kind of rod and reel set-up, and you have to have flies. If you're going salmon fishing you have to have the right kind of gear.

When my kids were younger we got them their own fishing poles. The one for Blakely was pretty cool – it was a Spiderman fishing pole. The girls' poles were nice as well...but they were Barbie or Dora or something like that, so not as cool to me. They didn't have these when I was a kid; I just had a plain, black and white rod and reel set-up. But Blakely's set up had most of what a person needs: There's a rod, a reel, fishing line, a hook, a weight...pretty close to being good to go. Another piece of equipment that

some people have is a boat. I don't have is a boat. Technically, you don't have to have a boat to go fishing. There are lots of ways to fish without a boat. But really, what fun is it without the boat, right? I would really love to have that piece of fishing equipment and then use it for water skiing and wakeboarding. So when my kids ask to go fishing, we go and stand at the shoreline, or on a dock, and we fish from there.

I remember a day 10 years ago – when I was, you know, about 22 ☺ – when I took my kids fishing at a pond near Chehalis, where we were living at the time. It was one of those rare Western Washington days when it didn't rain. It was some kind of special fishing thing where they'd stocked the pond with extra fish and you were basically guaranteed to catch one. And so I was going to teach my kids to fish. It was just Blakely and Hailey. We thought about bringing Brooke and using her for bait...☺ They were so excited...they looked up to me like I was a world-class fisherman...and I pretended to know exactly what I was doing. You ever been there dads, where your kids think you're the expert, but really you're far from it? Fake it til you make it, right? I mean, they had me on such a pedestal, they probably thought we were going to walk out on the water like Jesus, stick our hands in, and pull out fish. Now, I did know how to fish...it's not like I was clueless...but it had been a long time since I last went fishing. And we didn't have a boat. And since casting was the method of fishing I did as a kid when there wasn't a boat around, I decided to do that with my kids. Have you ever taken a 4 year-old and a 6 year-old fishing and tried to teach them how to cast the line out? Big mistake. Especially with only one adult present. It should be at least a 3 to 1 ratio: 3 adults per kid. We had several tangled messes, and seaweed and logs were the only thing we caught – we got “skunked” on a day when we were basically guaranteed to catch a fish. The problem was, we had the wrong equipment to fish that way from shore. I learned that day why some people fish with bobbers. I'd never used those before. We had the wrong equipment for fishing there.

Jesus says here that he's going to make these guys – who already know how to fish for fish – he's going to make them fishers of people. **He's going to show them how to help people have a relationship with Jesus, and He's going to do that by investing in the relationship He has with them.** You

see, the first thing Jesus says to them is “come, follow me.” Right there is the essential thing we need to know. Following Jesus – not in the same way you “follow” people on social media – following Jesus happens by actually engaging with Jesus through reading the Bible, where we learn from him, get trained by him, can imitate him, and so forth...this is the most important ingredient to being Jesus’ disciple. And through that relationship we have with Jesus, he equips us even further with the right equipment for fishing for people. We see that here: When Jesus called these first disciples, he told them that he would make them into guys who fish for people. **Everything else pertaining to “discipleship to Jesus” hangs on that opening invitation to follow him and be made into fishers of people.** That's the reason that Jesus invited them to follow him. So the first step is to follow Jesus. He’s the main piece of “equipment” that we need for this fishing expedition he’s leading us on, and then the rest flow out of that relationship and into our relationships with other people.

The second thing a good fisherman knows is where to find the fish, and then he or she goes there. Have you ever been on a paid fishing expedition with a guide? I never have. Those guys know where the fish are. But my grandfather knew where the fish were. I'd suggest going one place, and he'd say, “No. The fish like to hang out over here.” So that's where we'd go. And then he'd also tell me how much line to let out, because the fish don't swim at the surface, and you don't want to go too far down or you get your line caught on the bottom. You've got to go fishing where the fish are. Grandpa knew where the fish were. In fact, one summer, in a two-week span – maybe we went out 8 or 9 times? – my grandfather, my dad, and I caught 273 rainbow trout. That’s a lot of fish! Grandpa was as good as any paid fishing guide, because he knew where the fish were.

So for those of us who are a part of Jesus' fishing crew: Do we know where to connect with people who don't know Jesus? The answer is actually pretty easy: There are people everywhere you and I go who don't know Jesus, and Jesus wants to be in a relationship with them as he is with each of us who know him. So being in relationship with people who are in need of this personal relationship with Jesus isn’t difficult, in terms of knowing where people are. The problem is that we Christians aren't willing to

go where they are.

In fishing: **We can have all the right gear, we can know where the fish are, but if we don't go to where the fish are, we're never going to catch a fish.** No one has ever caught a rainbow trout or a halibut or a king salmon while sitting in their living room in front of the television, or while shopping at Nordstrom, or while driving their car on the freeway. The fish aren't there!

And yet, when it comes to reaching people for Jesus, so often we Christians don't take that initiative. We don't go to where the people are who haven't heard about Jesus Christ and his incredible love – and I don't mean that we don't go there physically or geographically. We're already there, geographically speaking. **Physical location isn't the issue: It's our commitment to, our hearts for, our investment, in other people's lives.** It's been said that in the church, our idea of fishing is to put all the exertion up to the fish. If *they* are ambitious we will lead them to Jesus. That's like saying, "Hey let's float in our boat on the lake and the fish will just jump in." But that's not what Jesus did. He went to the people physically, but he "went to them" in other ways and invested in their lives: He met their needs; He genuinely befriended people; He helped them out; He prayed for them; He listened to them (maybe the thing we can most easily imitate that he did). We see all this profoundly with the disciples. He really invested in them, spending three years discipling twelve guys, and invested in the lives of many other people along the way, too. Who are you and I investing in? Are we loving on our neighbors, or our spouse, and our kids? Are we with people where they are – not just geographically, but emotionally and relationally? Are we open and vulnerable with them and giving them those opportunities as well? Let's go there to those places with them. This all starts to slide into our next point which is....

Lastly, a fisherman who really wants to catch fish knows that you have to have bait that's attractive to the fish. My kids figured that part out early on when it comes to fishing for fish. I've taken them out to the shores of a lake or out on a dock, gotten them set up with their poles, and they look at the bare hook and say, "Dad, how does the fish know to bite the hook?" Clearly, in spite of the genes I passed on, my kids aren't dumb. And neither are the

fish. That's why you put something tasty on the hook that the fish will like, such as fish eggs or worms. It's not what you or I like, but that's irrelevant. When you're fishing, you use something that the *fish* will like.

It's the same thing with presenting the good news of Jesus Christ to someone. There are some things that are attractive, and others that aren't. Dwight Moody once had a gal tell him that she didn't like the way he did evangelism. He said, "I don't really like the way I do it either. Maybe I could learn from how you do it? She told him, "Well, I don't." So he replied, "Well, then I like my way of doing evangelism better than your way of *not* doing it."

But the best way, the most attractive way to present our faith, is simply to live it each and every day. To live out our relationship with Jesus. To live life with an attitude of gratitude. To have joy and peace in all circumstances. To live with humility and a servant's heart. To live with the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To be open and vulnerable and create safe spaces for others to do the same. None of us are perfect at that, of course. But God can move our hearts to live as He calls us. If there are certain times of life, or types of conversations or situations where you could live your faith a little better, then pray about that.

So, for example, if you and your spouse (or maybe some other situation for you) frequently get into an argument over certain topics...or if conversations tend to get sucked into a black hole and don't end well...then say a prayer at the start – or if you find yourself wandering into that conversation before you can pray then take a time-out from the conversation to pray briefly – and ask God to give you patience and an understanding heart and ears to hear. You can pray together, on your own...one of you, both of you...out loud, silently...doesn't matter. Then re-start the conversation, and I can just about guarantee you it will be a healthier dialogue. That is evidence of your relationship with Jesus – and it's attractive to others. Not with the intent of "hooking" them, but it's simply living out your faith...of being open about who you are and open about your faith...and it may help others to want and know the life-change love of God in Jesus Christ...and therefore, to follow Jesus.

So: Let this invitation that Jesus gives to follow him and become fishers of people be an encouragement to do that in an authentic, down to earth, every day kind of way. Keep in close contact with Jesus...maintain that personal relationship you have with Jesus, and let him work in you, and then through you to the people in your life.

And again, if you're here this morning and you don't know much about Jesus, or if you have doubts about Jesus because of Christians who have lived out their faith in unattractive ways, or you question the claims of Jesus, or you've just never really even thought much about who Jesus really is, or you think Jesus is as real as the tooth fairy and Santa Claus, I would invite you to dig a little deeper and look at Jesus again, because His invitation is to you as well. The Gospel accounts of Jesus and the letters between the early Christians that comprise the New Testament, as well as the rest of the Bible, stand up to the best of intellectual scholarship and historical criticism and archaeology and all that kind of stuff. It's not made up. Jesus really walked the face of the earth, really had relationships with a bunch of people who followed him, really died on the cross, and really rose from the grave. That doesn't mean Christians don't have questions. We all do. There are unknown things and things that happen in life that don't make sense. But Jesus shows himself to be true and worthy of our trust, and he says to each of us, "Come, follow me." May we each step forward in faith, letting him shape us as his disciples, as we heed his invitation to follow Him. Let's Pray...Amen.