

Fishing for People Flawed Yet Faithful Disciples

1 Peter 4:8-10 and Mark 1:14-20

Easter 6, Sunday, May 26, 2019

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Happy Easter!

Today is the sixth Sunday of Easter. We continue celebrating the good news of resurrection and new life, and we continue trying to figure out how to live as resurrection people, as people with new life, with the help of Peter, a flawed yet faithful disciple.

The reading from 1 Peter gives us some good guidance, encouraging us to love and serve one another.

⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Our gospel reading is the calling of Peter three other disciples. There are many well-known call stories in the Bible: Abraham and Sarah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, the apostle Paul, and more. In these varied stories, God calls ordinary people into service, to do great things.

There is some important vocabulary in this reading:

The term “good news” here is the same as gospel. And Mark’s gospel opens with: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Gospel means good news.

The word translated as “time” in this reading is not the Greek word “chronos” which is clock time. Instead, the word is “kairos” which means a special time, or a right time to do something important. One definition I saw said Kairos means “a propitious time for action.”

And then we have the word “Repent.” In the Greek it is plural in number, present in tense, active in voice, and imperative in mood. At it’s root, repent means to change direction, or even to change one’s mind. While the word has negative connotations for some people, it’s really an invitation into new life.

The reading begins with an almost parenthetical clause about John being arrested. So we know from the start that the ministry of Jesus has a social component, and this new Kingdom that Jesus proclaims is seen as a threat by the political power system of his day.

Two pairs of brothers are called, in parallel accounts. They are at work, they leave something behind and follow. What unifies the parallel accounts is the call to fish for people.

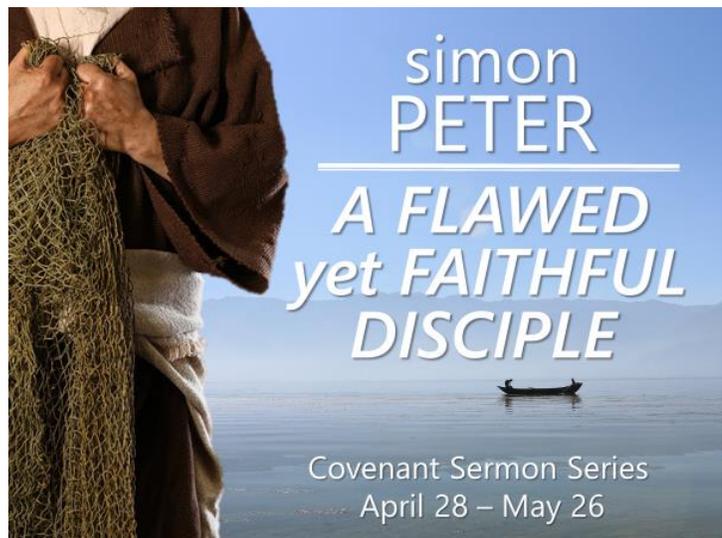
Listen for God's word.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Today we conclude a five-week series looking at Peter, arguably the most important leader of the first disciples of Jesus.

Our series is called *Flawed yet Faithful*, named after a sermon series by Adam Hamilton, a Methodist pastor and author who I greatly admire, based in Kansas City. My hope is that by looking a little more deeply at the life of the disciple Peter, we can learn about being disciples today.



Let's review.

Four weeks ago, we remembered how Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times, and then after the resurrection, Jesus gives Peter a second chance. In John 21, Jesus has Peter affirm his love three times, and three times, Jesus sends Peter out to tend the sheep, to care for people.

Three weeks ago, we saw how Peter took advantage of that second chance and became a great leader in the early church.

Two weeks ago, we saw how even though Peter wasn't perfect and even though Jesus called him a stumbling block, Peter became a solid rock, a strong foundation for the church.

Last week, we heard how Peter and the other disciples were encouraged to stick together and have faith in the storms of life.

Today, you heard the call of the disciples. They were fishermen. Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Jesus proclaims the coming Kingdom, the new reality of God, and calls them to follow, telling them that they will “fish for people.”

Fishing for people is an odd phrase if taken literally. Clearly Jesus doesn't mean using nets and hooks. He is inviting these fishermen to think about life in a new way, to discover deeper meaning to their lives.

This is the call for all Christians.

By calling us to fish for people, Jesus means loving our neighbors, loving our enemies. It means being kind, patient, courageous, and forgiving. It means feeding hungry people and working for justice in the world. It means, as the apostle Paul wrote, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice.

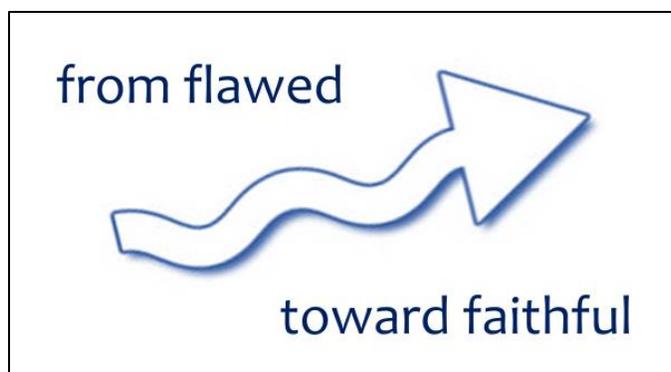
Another way of understanding this “fishing for people” idea is to think about having what Presbyterian pastor and consultant Stanley Ott calls “people eyes.”

“Those with ‘people eyes’ see people through the eyes of Jesus Christ, see them as people with needs to be met—spiritual, physical, emotional, social, and relational—and look for ways to do so.... Those with ‘people eyes’ have a heart for people....”

So we are called as Christians, to fish for people, to have people eyes.

In the framework of our series on Peter, the idea is that we're trying to move from flawed toward faithful as Christians, as disciples, as followers of Jesus. The hope is that in our interactions with people we become less selfish and foolish and greedy and rude, and more kind, gracious, humble, and caring.

So for instance let's say your friend's grandmother has died.



If you're more on the flawed end of the spectrum, you might say:

I remember when my grandmother died; it was a long time ago. I didn't know her all that well, but I was at summer camp and I didn't go to the funeral. But hey, that's how it goes.

A more faithful Christian might say something like: I'm sorry. I hope you're doing OK. If I can help you with anything, let me know.

And if appropriate they might say: Can you tell me a little about your grandmother?

Another example of a flawed and faithful response: Let's say a neighbor shares a different political opinion, or a friend posts a different opinion on social media.

A more flawed Christian might get snarky, or mean, or say hurtful things.

A more faithful Christian might choose to ignore it, or perhaps try to engage in respectful dialogue.

Or hypothetically, let's say you come to church on the first Sunday of summer worship, and someone is sitting in what you think of as your seat.

You could hover around the seat, coughing and looking irritated. Or you could take a deep breath and go sit somewhere else, and enjoy the new perspective, and maybe meet some new people.

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One of the best ways I know to move from flawed toward faithful is with prayer, asking God for help. I know I can't do this on my own, so I need God's love to change me and guide.

I came across this prayer several years ago

Loving God, Help me remember that the jerk who cut me off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day at minimum wage,

who was rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Merciful God, help me to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

Remind me, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day is a vet, struggling to survive, who is a slave to addictions that I can only imagine in my worst nightmares.

Help me to remember, loving God, that while the rest of us are rushing around impatiently before Christmas, the two old people walking so slowly through the store are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be their last Christmas together.

Lord of all creation, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. Open our hearts not just to those who are close to us but to all humanity. We thank you that in Jesus Christ, you forgive us and love us, even with all our faults and mistakes. Help us be slow to judgment and quick to forgiveness and patience and compassion and love. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

Another option is to prayerfully reflect on the day and on your interactions with people. Let's try it right now.

I invite you to take a couple of deep breaths, and close your eyes, if you like.

Think back over the past 24 hours and think about your interactions with people. Think about the moments of blessing, kindness, and joy. Were there times when you now realize you said or did the right thing? If so, give thanks to God.

Were there moments of stress and strain over the past 24 hours? Situations where you now realize you could have said or done something differently? If so, pray for the people involved, and ask God to give you wisdom and humility for the next encounter with that person.

Lord hear our prayers.

You can do that sort of prayerful reflection any time—like when you are driving to work or school, when you have a free minute, when you're lying down in bed at night.

You could close the prayer with: God help me to be a fisher of people. Help me to love my neighbors. Show me how to share your love with others.

What we need to do is use our own situations, our own particular circumstances to do good to other people.

That's the message of 1 Peter 4.10

Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

I feel like God is telling us to love your neighbors, wherever you are.

In other words, bloom where you're planted.

Each of us will have opportunities to be kind, gracious, and generous this week.

Maybe we can learn from the examples of other people.



Did you hear about Robert Smith, who pledged to pay off the student loan debt from the graduating class at Morehouse College?

With 400 graduates and something like \$10 million in debt, this is quite a gift.

That's "fishing for people." That's loving your neighbor. Most of us don't have billions of dollars, but I find his generosity inspiring.

And I appreciate that he challenged the graduating class to "pay it forward" to continue kindness and generosity however they can.

Or did you hear about the woman who saw a group of teens having a dinner on prom night, and she decided to pay for their whole dinner? A woman was dining alone in Clarksburg MD, and she saw this group, and decided to pay for their dinner.

The kids went over to thank her and according to one of the teens, “she told us to ‘always love ourselves’ and to remember that ‘we are beautiful inside and out,’”

Or did you hear about the letter carrier in Georgia who recently retired?

Apparently, he was extremely kind over the 20 years he spent on this route—sharing conversations, bringing in newspapers for elderly residents, giving kids a lollipop.



He had a way of taking what could be “just a job” and made it into an opportunity to serve people and make the world a better place.

So when he retired, people thanked and celebrated, by decorating their mailboxes and giving him gifts.

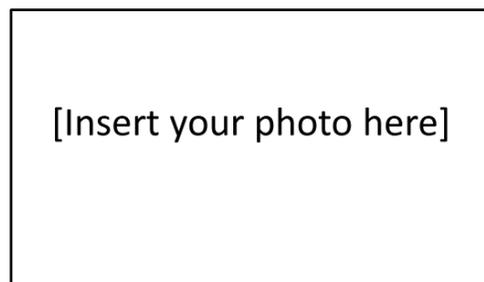
Three simple examples, of people eyes, of people being kind, of people making a difference.

I have one more.

What about you?

How can you make a difference this week?

On the prayer list, you see a space where you can write in the names of up to three people. You can write a name now, or later, but I encourage you to pray for one or two or three people in particular this week, with the hope of finding ways to care for them.



We fish for people, because God fishes for us.

We can be merciful and kind, because God is merciful and kind.

We can love one another because God loves us.

This is the good news of the gospel. Amen.