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Dan Hollis

In this world... you give a man a fish, and he eats for a day. *Teach* a man to fish... and you charge him a percentage of every catch.

I'm sure I'm *definitely* not the *first* person to make that joke out of the old saying, but I did come up with it on my own, so at least I can be proud of that. Though I do like the twist put on it by the character Ron Swanson from the sitcom "Parks and Recreation."

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Don't teach a man to fish, and you feed yourself. He's a grown man. Fishing's not that hard."

I would have to disagree with Ron, though, since I gave *up* on fishing a long time ago... having met with shall we say... *limited* success. And patience.

But I also think *Jesus* would disagree with Ron. Fishing's *hard*. The Son of *God* spent His whole ministry teaching people how to fish, and they *still* didn't get it. A whole *religion* has been spending two thousand years trying to learn how to fish, and yet to this day we still crack open our Bibles, struggling to get it right.

See, the first disciples Jesus called were already fishermen to begin with. That's where the trouble starts. Because people who already know how to do something have a really hard time being taught by somebody *else* how to do it *better*. You know anybody like that in your life?

When we encounter the first of the Disciples in our reading from the Gospels today, we see Simon and Andrew tossing their nets into the water.

It was a common practice in the area, and one of several methods of fishing people used at the time. Think of a nine-foot wide circular net weighted around the edges. You'd toss it just so into the water, either standing on the shore or somewhere out in the shallows. It'd come down around a school of fish, and you'd pull it in to examine your catch.

Well, Jesus came up to them one day and told them to follow him. He had a new way to fish to teach them.

Then he came across James and John out in a boat offshore, fishing in a different way. See they used a drag net, and you can probably picture how something like that works. You drop it out the back of the boat, held open by ropes like a big cone, and with it you gather up as many fish as you can as the

boat moves through the water. A very different technique than Andrew and Simon's.

But they, too, could do better, Jesus thought. So he called them too.

As the old saying goes, “build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door.” Well Jesus was a better mousetrap builder. He wanted to take the world the way he found it and make it better. To turn the kingdom of *people* into the kingdom of *heaven*. To stop us on the path we were walking, turn us around, and send us in a different direction entirely. That's what the Biblical word “repent” means. In Hebrew it's “to feel sorrow and turn around.” In Greek it's “a change of mind and conduct.”

A huge part of Jesus' ministry was to take people on a path of destruction, oppression, injustice, and selfishness, and turn them toward a path of healing, liberation, mercy, and service. He did that with individuals, and he did that with groups, systems, and empires.

And he did it with fishermen.

See, Jesus needed to up their fishing game. These four people—normal, everyday folks—had the potential inside them to do something incredible. And the Son of God asked them to trade in their nets for a bigger kind of fishing. A kind of fishing that would lead to a different sort of catch than they had *ever* reeled in before.

This is how Jesus operated. He would travel around, finding women and men, Jews and Gentiles, Roman citizens and foreigners from away, old and young, wealthy and poor, sick and tired... he would find *people*, people who had potential. Who had it in them to be something that the world needed—that *others* needed... that *God* needed. Jesus could see the worth of everyone he met, and made it His mission to get them to turn their lives around and realize their potential for good. How many will even *try* to do something like that? Then or now? Imagine the Roman emperor, or a temple priest, or a wealthy noble giving even a second *look* to a fisherman, or a sex-worker, or a leper riddled with disease. Even a *first* look? Let alone actively seeking them out.

But that's what Jesus did. The consummate carpenter, he could and *would* look at *any* mousetrap... and see a way to make it better.

And he could look at any net, any fisherman... and he couldn't help himself but to teach that man to fish.

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Now a contemporary angler would hear that sentence and say, “Okay, I think I see where you’re going. ‘Fish for people.’ I’ve got to find the right bait, go to the right fishing hole, lure the right people, wait for just the right moment... and sink that hook and reel the sucker in.” Very calculated, that evangelism. It’s what fishing’s all about, isn’t it? Tempt, coerce, bribe, entrap. Promise and ensnare. And then the *best* part: decide if you want to hang your catch on the wall or eat it for dinner. Or maybe get really tricky and put it in a fishbowl for your guests to admire.

That’s what you’re supposed to do with fish. Or lobster, or clams, or whatever seafood-based metaphor means the most to you.

But Jesus knew that wasn’t what he wanted for *people*. Jesus knew that if he was going to enlist a bunch of fishermen to help him build the kingdom of heaven, he was going to need to re-train the way they looked at the world—re-train the way they looked at *fishing*—so that they could carry on the movement he had begun, of gathering up God’s children for the good of all. Fishing for people.

So I ask you... what worth does Jesus see in you? What value can God see in your eyes? What is it that maybe you haven’t even seen yourself, that God can see *right* through to... What is it that makes you... a *catch*? What value could you possibly have to God?

Because I guarantee you its there. You have worth, you have value, and... beauty. You’re worth more than gold... or a lifetime supply of seafood.

Jesus could see it in everyone He met... and He would see it in *you* if you were to run into him today on the way back to your car.

So if you can believe it’s there... and God I hope you can... I want you to try and *figure out* what it is that would make Jesus fish for you. Because whatever that is—and it’s different for everybody—whatever it *is* is the same thing that would make you the perfect disciple. Like Simon, or John, or Mary, or Martha, or all the others who turned and followed Jesus from then ‘till now... God sees something special in you.

And when you figure out what that is—and maybe you have *already*, wouldn’t that be nice? Once you figure out what it is, *then* the real work can begin. Because then we have to answer the next question.

“What is Jesus trying to teach me, to *make* me better? To turn me around and show me a way forward.”

What better mousetrap has Jesus been trying to make of you since the day you were born? Let's listen, and follow... and find out. Amen.