“People Catching”

The Scripture basis for this sermon is one of those remarkable miracle stories that fill the gospels! Jesus is by the shore of Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee), and so many people are crowding around Him to hear Him speak He gets into a boat owned by Simon Peter, who’s a fisherman by trade. When He’s done teaching He asks Peter to row out to deeper waters and do some fishing. “Won’t do any good,” Peter says, “we fished all night and caught nothing. “But if You say so, I guess we’ll give it a shot.”

And so they do, and when they let their nets down so many fish fill the net that they yell to their partners who are in another boat, “We need help here!” They empty the fish into both boats, and the catch is so large that both boats can barely stay afloat! Peter is so awed by what has happened that he falls down in front of Jesus and with a quivering voice says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I’m a sinful man!” Jesus’ response is rather surprising, but it’s our text for this message: “Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people” (Luke 5:10).

Peter would be embarking on a “career change” – leaving the fishing business and following this rabbi named Jesus, as would his partners. In fact, Luke writes: “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything, and followed him” (Luke 5:11).

“From now on, you will be catching people!” This is similar to what Mark writes in his gospel, where Jesus calls these fishermen to be His disciples by saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

*Are you a fisher of men and women? A “people catcher”?* What happened with Peter (and then with the others who first followed Christ)is a pattern that’s meant to be repeated: We come to faith in Christ – we believe in Him, trust Him, follow Him – then we share what we’ve experienced with others.

For instance, each of the 4 gospels ends with Jesus, before He is taken back to heaven, telling His followers to share His message with others: Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. Luke 24:46-48 "He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations." John 20:21 "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Most people who become followers of Jesus do so because someone personally introduced Christ or His message with them. If you're a follower of Jesus, how many of you became a Christian through a radio or TV ministry? How many through an event like a Billy Graham Crusade? On the other hand, how many became a Christian because of the influence of someone you knew, like a family member, friend, pastor, Sunday School teacher? Isn't it true? Most came to Christ because someone you knew and interacted with shared their faith with you. *So, are you a fisher of men and women? A people catcher?*

Most of us aren’t! Most "Christians" aren't. I don't say this to be critical, or negative; I just think it's true. Many people who say they're Christians have never led anyone to faith in Christ. Many

believers don't even think much about sharing their faith with someone who's not a Christian – or are even motivated to do that.

Why is this? Maybe we don't really think people can be lost, and separated from God. Or maybe we think "witnessing" is only for pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and outgoing Christians with the gift of gab! Others aren't "people catchers" or fishers of men and women because we have this idea, "I don't have to talk about Jesus; I just let my life speak for itself."

Now, our conduct and behavior ought to be a shining light that brings glory to God – but is our life that good that people are flocking to Jesus just because they see how pure and pristine we are? Don't people need to hear about what Jesus taught, what Jesus claimed about Himself, what He had done for our salvation?

Still others aren't serious about being a "people catcher" because of some bad experiences they might have had with evangelism, or people "witnessing" or giving their testimony. I became a pastor when I was 19 years old. I still remember soon after I got my first church I was visiting a parishioner in the Harrisburg Hospital. I had on a black suit and a clerical collar. I had just left the hospital and was walking to my car when a young man approached me and said, "Father?" I said, "No, I'm a Methodist minister." His next words were, "Are you a Christian?" Maybe I was too sensitive and overreacted, but that really ticked me off. I think I kind of smiled, and said, "Yes, I'm a Christian", but in here (in my gut) I felt: Who do you think you are! Do I have to answer to you! I thought he was rude and intrusive and disrespectful. Maybe you've had experiences where you've been "witnessed to" in a way that just turned you off.

Perhaps the biggest reason why many sincere followers of Jesus are not fishers of people is that we feel intimidated, inadequate for the job. It makes us uncomfortable to even *think about* sharing our faith with a lost person. I feel some of that, too! It's a lot easier for me to talk about Jesus here in church, or when I'm functioning in my role as a pastor, then when I'm in a setting

where people don't know I'm a pastor.

Many of us have heard sermons on sharing our faith, maybe read books on witnessing, or had courses or Sunday School studies on evangelism, but we still haven't put all this into practice! We still aren't "people catchers"!

So with all of this in mind...let's think of some ***steps we can take to begin to fulfill Jesus' commission to be a "people catcher."***

*Of course, the beginning point is obvious: Make sure that at some point we have committed our own life to Christ.* I've made Him *my* Savior, *my* Lord. Make sure we've found a new life in Christ that's worth sharing with others.

*Next, resolve from this point to make people catching a life priority.* It's incredible that many sincere, devoted Christians give little thought to seeing lost people come to Christ.As I've prepared this sermon, I've committed myself anew to taking time each morning to pray that God will connect me to someone who doesn't know Christ, and perhaps open a door of opportunity to

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say a word for Christ to this person. What could be more important than seeing a lost person find eternal life in Christ?

*Develop a prospect list.* If you're in sales, it's pretty important to know who your prospects are, right?Anyone reading this who doesn't know someone who's not a Christian? Most of us at least know *someone* who's not committed to Christ or is not a believer.Relatives. Friends. Neighbors. Classmates. Coworkers. People where we getour car serviced, or our hair cut, or where we do our shopping.

*Make an effort to build relationships with people who don't know Christ.* One of the problems with people who've been Christians for a long time is that most, if not all, of our friends are Christians, or church people. How are we going to win lost people to Christ if we don't hang out with them, or build meaningful relationships with them? So we can work at this*.* Take an interest in people. Be a good listener. Be someone with whom others can learn to feel comfortable sharing their hurts or hopes. Developing deeper friendships with non-Christians might mean inviting an unchurched neighbor for a meal or cookout, or asking them if they want to go to a craft show, or ball game, or do something that you both have in common.Most people will be more open to the gospel if we take time to get to know them, and show that we care about them.

*Develop ways to initiate spiritual conversations.* It could be a question like: "Do you go to church?" "What do you want out of life?""Have you ever read the Bible?" "What do you think about Jesus?" "How can I ask God to bless you?" "How are things going for you....*really*."Ask these kinds of questions, and then *listen* to how the person responds. Gently try to use this as an opening for a deeper conversation about life, and God, and faith.

Christian t-shirts, hats, pins, buttons can lead to spiritual conversation. Google "evangelism apparel and pins" and you'll come up with a number of ideas. It could a pin that says "Blessed", or the sign of a fish, or praying hands, or "Riding for Jesus" (for bikers), or shepherd's staff, or a hook (for fishers of men). I've seen people wear these, and it creates interest, piques one's curiosity, In one church we were doing a 40 Days of Purpose church wide event. Some of us wore t-shirts that said, "Ask me about the journey...40 Days of Purpose... Discover your life's purpose". I wore it when I voted this past primary election day, and one of the ladies at the polling place asked me what it was about. All of these can be a way of grabbing people's interest and initiating a spiritual conversation.

*Then too, when given the opportunity, tell your faith story in a humble way.* People who come on strong, and always want to talk religion, or have little respect for where you're coming from in regards to God and life, or come across as more holy than you are – these people can do more harm than good (in my opinion). So tell your faith story in a simple, humble way. As someone said, a Christian is just a beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

There are different ways to tell our story. One is to basically say: This was what my life was like before I met Christ. This is how He made my life different, and is still changing me. Or,

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let's say the person you're talking to is going through a very difficult time in life. And you point to a time in your life when things were rough, and Jesus was there for you and helped you. Maybe the person is struggling with the death of a loved one, or a bad habit, or a resentment towards someone they can't let go of, and you can point to a time in your life when you struggled with that, and how the Lord helped you move through it.

Another way of sharing the gospel is to help someone understand Christ as the bridge that allows us sinful humans to get back into fellowship with God. We humans are sinners. God is holy. Our sins separate us from God. There is a great chasm between us and God. But Jesus and what He did on the cross provides the bridge that brings us back into fellowship with our Creator. His

cross extends across that huge chasm, and allows us to be back in fellowship and harmony with God, our Creator. I remember a Christian leader telling how he drew this imagery on a napkin in a restaurant as he was sharing the gospel with a friend.

*Another important step is to invite!* There comes a time when it's appropriate to invite a person to take that leap of faith and give their lives over to Christ. "Would you be willing to invite Christ into your life now?" "What's keeping you from becoming a follower of Jesus?"Not to do this is like a sales person describing a great product telling youhow beneficial it would be to have this, and then never asking if you want to buy it.

*Pray, and rely on the Holy Spirit.* Remember, God wants everyone to be saved. God loves the person you are sharing your faith with even more than you do. And one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is todraw people to Christ. So, you don't have to be "on your own" as you're trying to win someone to the Lord.The Spirit of God can give us the courage to overcome our fear, to share our faith, and even give us the words to say. A lot of people are hesitant to try to witness because we don't know enough about the Bible, or someone may ask a question about Christianity we can't answer.If we don't know the answer, say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll try to

find out (then call your local pastor, or more knowledgeable Christian friend)! If we wait until we know everything about the Bible or can ace a test on Christian doctrine, we'll never get going in sharing our faith! We don't have to know it all. Share what we've experienced or know, and trust the Holy Spirit to take what we say and use it for God's glory!

But what if I stick my neck out, share my faith, and someone says, "No thanks." Well, you're in good company with Jesus...the early apostles...and Christians through the ages who've had a heart for sharing the gospel! God gives every person the freedom to say "Yes" or to say "No" to the claims of Jesus. If a person says, "no", it doesn't mean we have failed. Nor does it mean that at some further point this person may commit their lives to Christ (maybe even remembering what we shared).

Jesus said to Simon Peter in the first century, and He says to every one of us if we've

given our lives over to Him: "*Do not be afraid*, for from now on, you will be *catching people*" (Luke 5:10).

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