Plenty of Fish in the Sea

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Sermon

Now one of the things, I was asked leading up to today was “are you ready?” I’ve had all week to think about that question. In fact, I’ve had a couple of weeks to become really anxious about that question, “Are you ready?” Appropriately enough, in light of today’s gospel reading, I want to turn that question to you.

Are you ready?

Before we answer this question, before we can arrive at Isaiah’s words, Isaiah’s eager words to the Lord’s call of “whom shall I send.” Before we can say unabashedly I’m listening, I’m ready “HERE I AM!, SEND ME!”

Before we jump to that answer, an answer I hope we can all move towards. It’s important for us to look at what the Gospel is asking of us in today’s reading.

Luke captures the story of Jesus calling the disciples, in particular relaying the experience of Simon Peter.

So today what we are being asked, is to consider discipleship in reference to Jesus’ teaching.

Now, I would say that I’m a Christian, and on many levels that implies I’m a follower of Christ.

It implies I’m a disciple and It implies that I share in the common mission of Simon Peter

To cast my nets, to go out and catch people.

But I wouldn’t introduce myself by saying, “Hello my name is Siobhan Sargent and I’m a disciple of Jesus Christ.” I’m more inclined to say I’m a Pisces than to officially say “I’m a disciple of Christ.”

Course I can also imagine the look on someone’s face if the first words out of my mouth included the word “disciple.” Could you imagine everywhere you go, the clerk at the bookstore, the attendant at the movie theaters, “Hi I’m a disciple of Christ.”

Today’s world, I often I here someone claim to being spiritual, but we shy away from words like “religious.” We shy away from words like disciple, and discipleship. A word like disciple wakes
us up, it startles us a little. In a setting outside the confines of the church, it moves us away from the everyday, and the commonplace.

So phrases like “Are you ready?” take on a whole new meaning.

This past weekend I went to Nashville. On my flight back to New York, I had the opportunity to sit next to a man named Sid. As I was walking towards my window seat, and Sid being in the aisle, the first thing he says to me as I begin to sit down, is “well, at least you’re not a big fat guy.”

Admittedly, I was taken a little aback by his comment. Sitting down, he continued to try and make conversation. Finally I acquiesced and gave him my full attention. I realized I just wasn’t going to finish that e-mail I was trying to send before the plane took off. I surrendered to the possibility that perhaps there was a reason this white, seemingly pleasant, middle-aged man was trying to talk to me--despite my first impression of him.

He quickly disclosed his life. And dived right in noticing he had my full attention at this point. He told me he was originally from Nashville, that he was a salesman who sold medical equipment. He had, had a son who about 5 years back, committed suicide, at the age of 18. He told me he had a wife of 31 years, and continued on about his two other sons and his daughter, who were all around my age.

All this he offered before he even asked me a single question about who I was. It was a peculiar 2 minutes of my life, I wasn’t quite sure where it was going.

He was, for the most part, charming and friendly. But finally, when he did get around to asking me what I did I saw Sid’s real intentions.

When I explained to him that I just finished my Master’s in Divinity and I was planning to someday pastor a congregation, that’s when I saw a shift in his energy.

Now I could go on to tell you how this man began to discuss with me biblical passages dealing with the condemnation of homosexuality, such as Romans 1.

(Maybe it was my short hair and converse that tipped him off (I don’t know)

Or I could mention how he continued to bring up verses in the bible that deal with a woman’s role in the church, inferring his belief that women should be at home taking care of the children and not out in the workforce and especially not in the pulpit.

I could mention those things,

And in doing so, many of you might quickly form an opinion of Sid, I know I did.
I mean the road he was headed down well let’s just say that there were a few moments in that hour plane ride when I just couldn’t believe my ears. I sort of just sat there dazed and confused.

But for the time being what I want you to do, is suspend your judgment.

I want you to take a moment and consider what is truly remarkable about this man, named Sid. What he told me, just before he went into his interpretation of scripture.

Now I need you to imagine for a minute, here is this older gentleman looking at you, the way a friend looks at you when they really need you to hear what it is they are saying. They need to be heard, they’ve got the most important news to tell you and they need you to hear and see them.

“The reason,” he said, “I’m so excited to talk to you is that even after the tragedy of my son’s death, what really gives me joy in this life is being a “disciple.”

He went on to expose himself, and to be really authentic and vulnerable with me, and he continues to look me straight in the eye, “I pray every time I get on a plane for someone to sit next to me, for the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ.”

Now, How many of us can lay claim to the same thing?

How many of us walk down the streets of New York praying,

How many of us encounter the people-filled streets of New York looking to engage with another human being? Do we, like Sid, see every person, as an opportunity? Look into their eyes as if they’re our dear friend?

I often look to the street sign, to see if I can make it across the street before it turns to that infamous don’t walk sign, or I’m staring off seemingly in the direction of other people but my mind is on my own business. I’m lost in my thoughts, or my music playing in my ipod.

Sometimes, I’ll glance into the shop windows, catch a glimpse of a sale item or my own appearance in the reflection of the glass. Sometimes I’ll just stare down at the ground or up at the buildings, but what I hardly ever do, is look dead into the eyes of those I pass by.

Let me ask you again, Are you ready?

Deitrich Bonhoefer describes Discipleship as costly and rightly so,

In a sermon, he writes “We are faced with the shocking reality: Jesus stands at the door and knocks, He asks you for help in the form of a beggar, in the form of a ruined human being in torn clothing, He confronts you in every person that you meet.”
No wonder Jesus said to Peter “Do not be afraid.” This passage in Luke should make you uncomfortable. Being a Disciple should make us all a little uncomfortable. Like the thought of gazing into a stranger’s eyes on the street, or even more, looking into their eyes and pausing to ask them how their day is, going out of our way to genuinely and authentically meet them.

Sure we can make excuses, to avoid this type of encounter, we can say to ourselves well I’m running a little late and I don’t have time for a long and involved conversation. Or I don’t know these people, they’re strangers. Who knows? They might be crazy or mis-interact my interest, my conversation with some sort of come on. Mostly we probably just don’t think about it, we just go about our days, caught in our own story, the hustle and bustle of our daily routine, that we simply forget to be intentional.

How often do we keep our guard up, remain in our own world and our own worries.

If we look to Sid as a possible example, though not the perfect example, his recognition that every person he meets is an opportunity to tell the Good News, to connect with them, to go into deeper waters.

How many faces do you pass a day, how many opportunities do you miss?

No wonder we shy away from words like disciple in our everyday use. If we really take to heart what the Gospel is suggesting.

Alone, we’ve been out there before, fishing. We probably have gone out of our way a time or two, and we’ve met disappointment, we’ve met heartache, we’ve met struggle, we’ve been tired and exhausted, we’ve tried and failed, the world is by no means an easy place, in fact at times it can be downright tragic.

The recent events in Haiti are a clear example of this fact.

But Jesus says, “Peter, go to deeper waters, cast your nets again.”

Interestingly enough, whether I want to admit it or not, Sid caught me. He peeled off his layers, he became vulnerable with me, he interrupted his day and went to deeper waters, he dared to look me in the eye, to go fishing for something deeper between us, Jesus. Sid rolled up his sleeves and cast his net.

Embedded in Jesus’ phrase cast your nets again, and fortunately Peter’s obedient response, there is in the call of discipleship a promise.

Peter doesn’t get one boat full of fish but two and both boats are overflowing. But, When Jesus says “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people,” He definitely raises the stakes, this isn’t some fishing excursion. Fish are one thing, but people?
The Christian life--Christian discipleship--requires us to go into the deep waters, going into the thick of it, with one another, with our fellow human beings, to roll up our sleeves. That’s the scary part, fish are one thing, but people that’s a call on our lives.

That’s a call on us, as we walk down the street. Discipleship is a call to us to actually look into the eyes of those we pass by as a possible opportunity. It is a call to shed off our excuses and to let down our guard, to be authentic and vulnerable with one another, with every person we meet. That isn’t a small order.

No wonder Peter and the other disciples put down everything when they got back and followed Jesus, you wouldn’t have time to do anything else, as many fish as there are in the sea, there are people on this planet.

Now maybe Sid didn’t catch me with his rendition of Roman’s 1 and his understated homophobia, but his honesty, vulnerability and desire to meet me in the thick of human existence, he looked into my eyes. He let down his guard long enough and allowed me to interrupt his existence, his world of medical supplies and his wife of 31 years and all the demands that places on a man of his age, his son’s suicide.

This idea of discipleship and being a disciple in light of Luke’s text

Radically,

Drastically,

Changes the world around us.

It dramatically flips the world as we know it, the world as Peter knew it, upside down. It is nothing less than a paradigm shift from impossibility to possibility, from scarcity to abundance.

A simple “how are you?” on the street or friendly nod, even eye-contact should call us to attention. It should move of us out of ourselves.

Every person we meet, we are called.

We are confronted,

As your eyes meet with theirs

“Don’t be afraid” Jesus says,

From now on you will be catching people.

And the miracle of the story is simple, there’s “Plenty of fish in the sea.”
I’m going to ask you again,

Are you ready?