

Jon Hauerwas – June 19, 2016 – “Is That in the Job Description?”  
Isaiah 63:7, 16 and Isaiah 64:8 and Mark 4:35-41

Does anyone know what the most dangerous civilian profession in the United States is? Each year since 1992, the answer has been fishing. Explanations for the fatalities are many. These include malfunctioning gear, transportation incidents, and inclement weather. Yes. Despite our many technological advancements and enhanced forecasting tools, the high seas remain wild, untamed, and unpredictable.

Just imagine, then, how dangerous it was in Jesus’ day. And yet, what was the most common profession among Jesus’ first disciples? Fishing. Is there any connection here? In selecting mainly fishermen to serve as his followers, was Jesus actually foreshadowing the danger and adventure that was to come?

We already know that Jesus intended for this profession to serve as a metaphor for discipleship. “Come,” he said, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” But, are there also certain aspects of the fishing trade that Jesus was keen to harness and put to use for the purpose of God’s kingdom? – Like the adventurous, risk-taking spirit of every professional fisherman.

Jesus, as we know, was not a fisherman. Instead, his profession was more conventional. In the Greek, he is called a *tehton*. Over the years, this word has often been translated as carpenter, but it could just as easily mean stone cutter. In short, Jesus was a skilled craftsman – an apprentice of his father. And more to the point, he was neither as capable nor as experienced on the sea as many of the men who followed him.

So it is curious, then, is it not – that when trouble arises and the boat is being pummeled by the waves, the men seek out Jesus? The text tells us that he is asleep in the stern. They are scared. He is their leader. So, naturally, they wake him up.

In my mind, this is great passage for Father’s Day because it is so reminiscent of parenting. A crisis comes along. Dad is enjoying a few minutes of rest or sleep and, but the baby is crying and she needs a new diaper. Or the preschooler is punching mom and using mean words. He needs to be restrained.

Perhaps, another child has just called your middle-schooler a loser. She is crushed and doesn’t know why it is so hard to make friends. Your high-schooler is struggling to maintain focus and has just been caught cutting class. He needs your help. Your college student is suffering. She is reeling from a broken heart and a

damaged self-esteem. You are jolted awake, or the phone rings to interrupt you. Dad, there's a problem. Can you help?

I certainly don't mean to minimize what was happening on the boat that day – only to say that there are all kinds of problems that call out for our attention. Some of these issues are easily addressed, while others may seem as daunting or overwhelming as the powerful waves of a tireless sea.

How much easier life would be, we imagine, if we could only intervene. If we could only calm the waves and still the storm. If we could only make every path straight. If we could always say the right things at the right time. If only we could be Jesus.

But, we are not Jesus. And no matter how hard we try, the wind and the seas will not obey us. We are human – even fathers, which means that we will stumble often, and we will sometimes fall. In time, wise fathers understand that it is not possible for us to fix and save everyone around us. But, we were never intended to be the savior.

On Father's Day, we are right to celebrate the goodness that has flowed from the many men in our lives, just as we acknowledge that shortcomings that they have demonstrated along the way. Surely, there have been many occasions that have been less than ideal, perhaps even harmful. I pray that we can find the courage to heal and move on. Because dad was never intended to be the savior, either. All along, he was only meant to be a teacher, and protector, and guide – imperfect though he may have been in fulfilling these roles.

We praise God for the dads who gave it their all. Who were a bit more loving than their fathers were, or a bit less selfish. We give thanks for fathers who were patient. And for fathers who told us the truth. We often expected them to have all of the answers, but they helped us to understand that coping with “I don't know” is an important part of life. And we thank you for dads who were unwilling to stand on a pedestal for it was in those moments that our concept of God began to take form. We praise you, God, for fathers who have stayed in contact, and for fathers who still yearn for relationship with their children.

Just about every day, I speak on the phone with my father. He is not perfect, and neither am I. It might be easy for us to forget this. After all, he is my father, and I am a pastor. He once joked that I am his ticket to heaven, even though we both

know better. The reason that we get along so well is that we have agreed, without ever saying it directly, that neither of us will adorn a pedestal. We try, as best we can, to overlook the faults and shortcomings of the other. We challenge each other, and we laugh often.

Have I awoken him far too many times to talk about issues large and small? Of course, I have. Sometimes, he was able to answer my question or solve the problem and at other times he wasn't. What else could I expect of someone else who is just as human as I am? And yet, when I do call out, he is there.

Once, Jesus was in a boat with a band of fishermen. It started taking on water and they didn't know what to do. Never before had they felt so alone. So they woke him up. And when he answered their cries, their eyes were opened. At that moment, they knew that God was with them. What a powerful message for Father's Day and beyond. May it be so and all thanks be to God both now and forever. Amen.