

I remember learning to fish off of a tiny pier with a bright yellow fishing rod on Kangaroo Lake in Door County, WI. I was probably six years old and deeply into a Tweety Bird phase, so I excitedly went along to fish because I loved the bright yellow pole, and being able to spend time with my dad and older sisters on the lake. My dad did not shy away from teaching us some of the grosser and nitty-gritty parts of fishing - we had to pull out the live bait container, learn what bait even did, dig in that dark dirt, hook the worms onto our own fishing hooks, and cast our lines into the lake without catching on anyone's hair or clothes. There were mixed successes and reactions throughout the ordeal.

And of course, off of that tiny pier, we caught the smallest lake trout and blue gills you can imagine, barely bigger than minnows. These were not fish for keeping or sustenance, they were simply caught for the enjoyment of the activity. So learning how to hold onto the fish and kindly release it from the hook and back into the lake was probably the hardest, slimiest, grossest thing my six year old self could imagine. There was much squealing and squirming involved, which certainly did not help our chances of catching future fish either.

But learning to fish wasn't really for the sake of catching the fish, at least not in that stage of life for me. Fishing was about the intention of spending time with my family and learning something new, a mix of skills, culture, and appreciating the environment I was in, that really made it worth it for me. It was the action, rather than the result that I loved. There were things that came easily to me and I enjoyed, and others I had to work hard to overcome my hesitation in order to embrace. Both of these aspects of learning to fish made that hobby worth it for me.

In our Gospel story today, the fishermen we meet are, of course, much more mature, and used their fishing skills to make a living, to feed their families and communities. Fishing gave them purpose, and life, to get up each day, head to their boats and the sea, cast their nets into the water and do the hard, physical work of hauling in boatloads of fish, on the good days. The good days required significant effort and exertion, the bad days required sacrifice yet hope in an internal way, that perhaps when they get

back at it again the next day, the fruits of their labor will provide sustenance and life. Even on the bad days, they still had to get up the next day and cast their nets, tending to the tedious and temporal work of their calling. Doing the thing each day provided hope that more life, in fish and livelihood, would come the next day, and the next, and the next.

When's the last time we put that much effort and intention into a daily practice of faith? Of fishing for people? Of seeing the work of God in our life? Of being challenged enough in our faith practices that we might be uncomfortable yet we know it will sustain our lives? How often do we think of our faith as life-sustaining.

The kind of calling Jesus gives to us is not my lovely six year old, squealing when it gets gross or challenging, hobby kind of fishing. The calling Jesus gives for us, for our lives, is the livelihood, daily tending, hard work, life-sustaining, continually showing up kind of fishing. Following Jesus requires us to daily die and rise in the promises of our baptism, reminders of God's promises to be our God and never forsake us. Following Jesus calls us to the work of faith, the living out the good news in the reality around us, fishing for real live people around us, rather than keeping it only in our heads or hearts. Fishing for people is really about love, about acting in such a way that we cannot help but embody the love we have for our fellow people, in our everyday interactions, in the ways we show up and shine forth real love for the people around us.

And it's true, showing up fully and following Jesus can feel risky sometimes. God always promises to comfort God's people but never promises to be comfortable. The news is always good, but it's not always in our definition of good. There is always life-sustaining nourishment to be found in the love and grace of God but it is not always easy or palatable.

So often we marvel at what the disciples, Simon and Andrew and James, left behind in order to follow Jesus and those sacrifices cannot be ignored. They left behind their livelihood, their way of supporting themselves and their communities, the entire lifestyle and geography that was familiar to

them. They even low-key left their dad behind with their coworkers! My goodness.

But the calling from Jesus was much more about what they were called to, rather than what they were leaving behind. The calling to follow Jesus, the Messiah, who proclaimed the good news and that the time had arrived was so enticing, so life-saving and holy and whole and good, that the risk to leave everything behind was worth it. The disciples were called to something new, they did not linger on what was being given up. Instead they had deep faith and trusted in the Messiah, in the good news, and followed towards that kingdom of God which had come near.

Where in our lives are we so afraid of what we might leave behind, that we don't take the holy risk of going somewhere new? Going somewhere we feel called to? Maybe this calling comes in the hard and holy work of tending to your mental health - leaving unhealthy coping behind and boldly going forth in healthy ways of managing your stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, whatever is ailing you and wherever you need healing. Maybe this calling is to leave behind limited or cynical views and listen to people with whom you disagree or who have a different perspective than you - where can we find beloved humanity in the larger, diverse, dearly loved body of Christ? How can we more deeply love God and neighbors, as Jesus calls us to? Or maybe this calling is to a deeper spiritual practice, a stronger life of prayer and grace, a commitment to see Jesus in all people?

God promises and calls us to new and abundant life, and that new and abundant life comes when we embody that calling to follow Jesus. When we lay down our nets and drop layers of what is familiar to boldly go forth in faith and love. Even the hope and new life that came from Christ was not without sacrifice, hardship, and pain. In His torment and death on the cross for our sakes, Jesus endured the true suffering of humanity so that we can have new and abundant life. In our humanity, we are not separated from our fellow beloveds who also suffer, including the suffering of Jesus. It was only from that season of death and grieving and tending by faithful women that then Jesus rose out of the tomb, rolled away that stone and indeed

rewrote the whole story - death will never keep us from the powerful love of God. Sin will never hold us captive when we lean into the calling of love given by God and the new life of Jesus Christ. Even when things are risky, when the seas are stormy or path forward isn't clear, God is with us. Jesus is with us. And that promise, the promise that our loving, creator God is with us, is certainly worth following.

So friends, when we hear Jesus' bold claim for us to follow Him, to repent and believe the good news, let's really believe in that good news. Let's be unafraid of the things we may need to leave behind in order to fully embrace the life that following Jesus allows us. Let's trust and have faith that repenting of what keeps us from following Christ will in fact give us the new life, the good news that is real and living and promised to us. And let us follow Christ in fishing for people, deeply loving God and loving our neighbors in all we do. It will save and sustain our lives, to follow the calling of love that Jesus offers us every single day. Thanks be to God, Amen.