

On the first week of this sermon series called Catch, this story was our scripture:

18 As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. **19** “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” **20** Right away, they left their nets and followed him.

We’ve asked you to think about what it means to follow Jesus, and what it means to fish for people. And this last week of the sermon series is where the call for us to drop our nets and follow Jesus becomes real--very real. This week the invitation is to place your life before God and to catch new life in Christ Jesus. Hear these words from:

Romans 12:1-8 The Message version (MSG)

Place Your Life Before God

12 1-2 So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

3 I’m speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it’s important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

4-6 In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn’t amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren’t.

6-8 If you preach, just preach God’s Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don’t take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don’t get bossy; if you’re put in charge, don’t manipulate; if you’re called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don’t let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

God has a purpose for your life.

God's purpose for your life is that you would take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. God created you with certain gifts and skills, abilities, talents and treasures to accomplish God's good purposes. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing ---- God wants to use us in amazing ways -- to show the love of God to others -- to share the good news of this love with people who have no idea. In our baptismal vows, we promise to be Christ's representatives in the world. **We represent Christ** in the world. We are the hands that heal and love and forgive. We are the ones that serve and share God's hope. We are the ones that demonstrate to the world how to rely on God rather than living in fear and anger and jealousy that the world seems to draw us to. We are the hands and feet who feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, proclaim the good news and strive to free the oppressed. If the world is going to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit it is up to us.

Now, today's scripture says that when we place our lives before God as an offering, when we fix our focus on God, we **are changed from the inside out**. Not only do our hearts and minds change, but our everyday walking around lives look different. The way we speak is different. The way we react to difficult situations is different. The way we respond to our families and our co-workers is different. When we grow more spiritually mature, the fruit of God's Spirit appears in us --- our friends begin to notice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. I've even heard people say that a person who has truly experienced God has a different physical look and bearing. I have a friend who went to the Walk to Emmaus - it is a spiritual retreat designed to raise up Christian leaders. The reason she really wanted to go is that her father had gone when she was a kid -- and she said that when he came back from that weekend he was an entirely different person -- he had been changed from the inside out. The way he interacted with and loved his family and even his entire demeanor had changed. When we allow God to shape us like putty in God's hands, we will be new people. And the stunning thing is that when we place our lives before God, people notice it -- and they want whatever it is that we have found.

Paula D'Arcy said, "God comes to us disguised as our lives." The question for us is, will we notice it and respond? The Apostle Paul gives some very particular suggestions about placing our lives before God, and I am glad for that because these are beautiful words but difficult to put into practice. I love the idea of offering my life to God, but what does that mean? How do I submit my everyday life to God? Well, Paul says that part of this is to accurately understand ourselves. He says to "readily recognize what God wants from [us], and quickly respond to it." He calls us to humility and also to recognize that God is the one who has given us all that we are. He says, any grace that we have is from God. Likewise all of our gifts and talents and treasure come from God, and we ought to use all that we have and all that we are for God's work in the world.

So, here are some things to think about. Would you consider what your **spiritual gifts** might be and how you might offer them to God. You may have taken a spiritual gifts inventory -- there are many of those out there to help you think about you are - here is one you can take online. Paul talks about some of these gifts in today's text-- preaching, teaching, encouraging others, leadership, serving. There are several other scriptures that describe a variety of spiritual

gifts. And the point is that every one of us have different gifts, and when we all use our gifts the body of Christ is healthy -- Paul points out that no gift is more important -- just like a human body -- the nose is important and the toe is important and the eye is important -- all are necessary for a healthy body.

The other ways I ask you to discern who you are and what your particular purpose might be is to think about your everyday walking around life. How can your vocation be part of your God-given purpose? Teachers and nurses, mechanics and cashiers, waiters and police officers --- each and every vocation can be used to share God's love. We can do it daily as we work, and we can also ramp it up -- I love the way medical professionals share their training with people at the Last Sunday breakfast at this church --- taking blood pressure and blood sugar. I love the way beauticians come and share their professional skills by giving free haircuts at the Last Sunday Breakfast. The possibilities are really unlimited.

Consider, too, what hobbies or talents or skills do you have that might lead to sharing God's love? We have people who knit prayer shawls and a darts team who gathers for fellowship, we have a book club that is forming to learn about social justice issues. How do you spend your free time? What is your passion? How can **that** be used for God's purpose of sharing God's love with others?

How can your previous life's experiences both good and bad relate to God's work? Have you experienced grief or loss or addiction---and how might God use this for God's work? How can your personality and your talents be used to serve God? Are you a musician or an athlete -- are you a patient person, do you like to play with children, are you a gardener? There are so many things about you that become the way that you represent Christ in the world in your everyday walking around life!

A few years ago a pastor preached about how to discern our life's purpose, and he quoted Frederick Buechner who said this:

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

There was a person in the congregation that day who heard this quote. And it sunk deeply into her. So much so that it inspired her to commit to leadership in the creation of a local Habitat for Humanity which builds low cost housing for people in need. It had been talked about for many years in that county--- people had gathered to meet and research how to do it, but nothing had ever happened. Until the Holy Spirit inspired one woman to action. You see, nothing is impossible for God.

Many of you know that my son is a football coach. And this year in one of their crucial games against a huge rival, something amazing happened. It was right before half-time, and they were clinging to a slight lead. My son's team had the ball on the opponent's 36 yard line -- they had time for one more play. My son called a hail Mary pass into the end zone. The quarterback dropped back to pass, the receiver made it to the end zone -- but he was surrounded by defensive players--they were all around him. The ball sailed into the end zone -- all the players jumped into the air going after the ball. It was like a slow-motion clip --- the crowd got silent because I'm pretty sure every single person was holding their breath--and then half the stadium erupted into cheers. The receiver had miraculously caught the ball! And we must have spent the whole halftime jumping up and down like crazy people! That catch was a total game-changer.

And the thing that I learned later is that that play wasn't some out of the blue play call. You see, the team had practiced that play every day at practice. It had never worked before, but they kept practicing. And in **this** game every person on the team did his job -- the quarterback, the receiver, the line -- they all played their individual roles. They came up with a plan and executed it with confidence. The receiver was ready and in position to receive the ball when it was thrown. And this catch was a game-changer----they were clicking as a team and confident, and they won the game. I still remember the feeling of excitement and joy, and I am only a coach's mom. The joy of that catch was tangible.

But nothing compares to the joy of catching a new life in Christ. When we place our lives before God, when we offer our lives for God's purposes, the joy is overwhelming. And it is not a momentary joy -- it is a daily, lifetime experience. And not only that but catching the love of Christ is a **game changer** -- not just for you. But for your children and grandchildren, your friends, your co-workers and all those people that you have the opportunity to share God's love with all the days of your ordinary, everyday, walking around life.

This day, would you be open to receiving a new life in Christ -- it takes practice -- good old-fashioned, time consuming practice -- digging into scripture, being still before God, serving others, worshiping, getting involved with a small group. And as you open your heart and mind for the presence of God, and as you practice and as you put all that you are into it --- don't be surprised when you make the catch of a lifetime.

Challenge - take a spiritual gifts inventory, think about how you might offer your life to God through vocation, experiences, hobbies, passions, etc.

Benediction

Do not be conformed to the ways of the world,

to its cynicism, fear, and divisions.

But let your mind and heart continually be open

to transformation,

to goodness,

to all the possibilities of God.

Go in peace:

Tell others about God's love,

transform the world,

do good,

embody in your life all that is possible through God.