

“Pick-up Lines That Work”

Mark 1:16-20

June 11, 2006

Sermon by Jan Edmiston

In July I'm going to a church development conference which – just like many conferences you've attended – required me to sign up for various workshops through the week. I signed up for a workshop on assessing leaders, another one on grant-writing. But *this one* especially caught my eye:

Pickup Lines Guaranteed to Work
Workshop Leader: Doug MacMillan

“Let's face it. Spreading the word about a new church is way too much like the singles scene. You meet lots of people . . . you shake lots of hands . . . you exchange some meaningful looks . . . you give out your phone number over and over . . . and every once in a while, someone is interested.”

The point is: how do you talk to someone about faith in such a way that they would be interested? And then how do you go about inviting them to your church?

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There was an article about pick-up lines in *The Washington Post* a few weeks ago¹ that illustrated the variety of conversation starters for meeting people:

There are the lame and smarmy: “*What's your sign?*” “*Do you come here often?*”

There are the honest: “*That's a nice outfit you're wearing.*”

There are the playful (This one at a pool party): “*Hey, I'll race you across the pool!*” (Little did the challenger know that the woman he'd challenged was on her college swim team and she easily beat him to the other side of the pool. “But she married me anyway,” he wrote.)

There are the quirky: “*Do you know how a toaster works?*” --- a favorite of a couple of young professional men in Washington who have found this line highly successful for starting conversations in local bars.

¹“Stand Still So I Can Pick You Up,” *The Washington Post*, Sunday, April 23, 2006, page M04.

“The non sequitur lowest-common-denominator conversation piece has helped me out ever since. It's all in the delivery,” one of them shared.

If this is true – that *it's all in the delivery* – then Jesus' “delivery” must have been amazing. And his comment to Simon and Andrew was a bit absurd, a *non-sequitur*. My kids would call Jesus' remark “random.”

The two fishermen used to catching tilapia and carp² meet Jesus who suggested it was possible to fish for people. **And it worked.**

. . . immediately, they dropped their nets and followed him.

Two *other* brothers – James and John – were fishing with their father, Zebedee, and when Jesus called them, they left their father and followed Jesus. We aren't told what Jesus said to James and John here, but it must have been irresistible.

Obviously, the pick-up line:

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people”

was *not* about making a romantic connection. It was much deeper than that. **It was about taking a new life path.** It was about changing *directions*.

But let's look a little closer.

Jesus makes it clear from the get-go that **this is about *Following Him***. This is going to be about *Jesus*. This is not about getting *out* of something. (You don't like the commercial fishing business.) This is *not* about the disciples.

This is going to be about going where *Jesus* goes, doing what *Jesus* does. He will clearly be the leader.

² The Sea of Galilee is still a fresh-water lake, home to the same kinds of fish today as in the first century.

And then Jesus *doesn't* say:

I'll teach you how to fish for people. OR

I'll show you how to fish for people.

He says: *I'll make you fish for people.*³

The Greek word for “make” here is not “I’ll *force* you to do it.” The Greek word is *poieo* (pronounced poy-EH-o) and it means:

I'll prepare you to fish for people.

I'll appoint you to fish for people.

I'll ordain you to fish for people.

This is what we are about today as we will ordain and install new leaders. But this message is for every one of us.

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Fishing is the kind of business – or sport – that can be serious or casual. The casual fisherman (or fisherwoman) might just grab a pole and some tidbits from the fridge for bait, and set out on a boat for a lazy day on the water. If he catches something – great. If he doesn't catch something – not a problem.

Someone who fishes *because his life depends on it* is much more serious. He uses the best equipment he can afford. She seeks training and advice from the pros. I met a professional fisherman from Alaska last fall, and he wasn't exaggerating when he said that his job was dangerous and sometimes life-threatening. He had the cut-up hands and weathered face to prove it.

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³ This is almost exactly like the version in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 4:18-22) but in Luke's version, Andrew is not mentioned. Jesus stands in Simon's boat to preach, then instructs Simon on how to catch more fish, and then Jesus says – also to Simon's fishing partners, James & John – Do not be afraid; from now on your will be catching people.” (Luke 5:1-11) In John's gospel, Andrew hears from John the Baptist that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” and he introduces his brother Simon to Jesus. (John 1:35-40)

Simon and Andrew, James and John were fishing because their lives depended on it. Fishing was their business, and according to the Gospel of Luke, the two sets of brothers were business partners.⁴

Men in First Century Galilee went into the fishing business because their *fathers* were fishermen. Some were prosperous in the business. Some were not.

We know that James and John's father Zebedee was a successful fisherman because he could afford to hire extra men. We aren't told what Jesus specifically *said* to the sons of Zebedee. But it must have been quite compelling, because the two brothers left their father there in the boat with the hired hands.

They left that day with Jesus because of **something he said** -- sort of like the ultimate "pick up line."

But knowing Jesus from other Bible stories, it's clear that Jesus not only *spoke* alluring words; there was *a way about him* that drew people closer. They were intrigued. They were attracted to him, not in a sexual way (I'll be bold to say). But in a charismatic way. This was a person who was different from most people.

He was as likely to talk to the weak as to the powerful. He was as comfortable talking with the poor as the rich. He did not flinch when people approached him who were physically sick⁵ or mentally ill⁶ or in serious legal trouble⁷.

Jesus stood firm and told those in trouble and the witnesses who gathered that ***he served a God who could help them.*** Whatever their problems were: bitter grief, utter hopelessness, ruined reputations – God could help them. God was not just for the ones who had everything going for them. In fact, *God especially welcomed those whose lives were messy.*

⁴ Luke 5:7

⁵ See Matthew 8:2.

⁶ See Mark 5:2.

⁷ See John 8:3.

That authority, *that firm statement of faith* was like **a cosmic lure** .

This is how Jesus fished for people. And this is how he taught his disciples to fish for people – by caring for them, by listening to them, by touching their hearts.

I don't know much about fishing, but I was the granddaughter and still am the daughter-in-law of a couple of serious fishermen. I've seen many different kinds of lures you can use for fishing.

There is a lure called a jig with feathers or wisps on the body and a head on the top. There is a lure called a wobbler that's larger and meant to lure larger fish. There are spoon lures and fly lures – all meant to help catch different fish in different waters. These lures have hooks attached meant to *grab hold of* and *take the life of* the fish.

Jesus used lures too – pick up lines that were irresistible. And they grabbed hold of human beings – not to *take* their lives – but *to make their lives more complete*. Jesus used lures like this:

Follow me and I'll make you fish for people.

Or like these:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled; believe in God. Believe also in me.*⁸

*What is impossible for mortals is possible with God*⁹

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*¹⁰

Jesus said some very hard words too, words that people needed to hear about commitment and sacrifice. But those words would come later.

But Jesus had an amazing ability to lure different kinds of people with different words and actions that would impact them, that would draw them closer. He wasn't trying to reel them in and destroy them, though. He was trying to gather them in so that they might be changed, they might be saved.

⁸ John 14:1

⁹ Luke 18:21

¹⁰ Matthew 11:28

So, if we are Jesus' disciples now, how do we gather people in so that their lives would be changed, so that they might be saved? **Have we learned how to fish for people?** It's not just my job as a pastor. It's not just the job of elders and deacons.

We are all called to hold God's people in our hearts, as the hymn goes. There are people we meet every day who are in trouble. Their troubles might not be visible. Maybe they are lonely. Maybe they are unsure of themselves. Maybe they are looking for life to be different.

What "lines" would we use to share the news that *the God we serve could help them?* The God *we* are trying to follow is not interested in luring someone close so that they can be destroyed. The God *I* know wants to invite people closer *so that their lives might be different.*

What we'd like from you – right now – is to reflect for just a moment on how this particular church has answered God's call. And how we haven't. And ponder how God has called you as a disciple.

God continues to call us, not merely so that our lives might be different, but so that we might make a difference in someone else's life too.

Let us pray:

Come down, O Love divine. Seek out all our souls and fill us with your Spirit. Amen.