

## **Deacon Ordination Meditation**

**Matthew 4:12-23**

**Second Baptist Church, Memphis**

**January 27, 2008**

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I'm going to admit something to you. It may offend some of you. I don't mean it to be offensive. But I just need to tell you the truth. I don't like fishing. I don't have anything against those of you who love to fish. I'm happy for you. I just don't like it.

It's not like when I say I don't like squash or eggplant, and you could say, *Well, you just haven't tried it.* That would be true. But I've tried fishing. My grandparents on my dad's side lived on a lake, and I fished there quite a few times when I was young. I have told you in other sermons about going fishing with my dad off the Gulf Coast of Texas. I've tried it. I just don't like it.

So when Jesus issues his call, *Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of people*, it doesn't have quite the same stirring ring to it for me as it does for some of you.

In fact, if you press Jesus' metaphor a little, you can even begin to wonder if fishing is the best image for God's call on our lives.

When you go fishing, really what you're trying to do is trick the fish into swallowing the hook. So you dress up the hook with bait—something that looks really good, something that appears to be what the fish are looking for. But it's not.

Actually, I'll go so far as to say that fishing is dishonest. It's misrepresenting reality so that you can get the fish to bite. Is that what Jesus was calling Simon and Andrew to do?

Is that what we're called to do as followers of Jesus—put out the right kind of bait for unbelievers (something we think they will like but that is actually hiding the reality that's underneath) and then sit back and wait for them to bite?

Are we called to pull the old "bait and switch" on people?

I hope that's not what we're doing. Although I must admit that that does describe some of what passes off as evangelism among some of us.

We put something out there that has nothing to do with the gospel, that has nothing to do with the real thing, and then we hope that the non-Christian will be attracted by that bait so that we can then reel them and show them our true intentions.

Obviously, I doubt Jesus had that in mind when he called Simon and Andrew by the Sea of Galilee. But we have often approached it as if "fishing for people" is the one and only model Jesus intended. You know, all of us are to "fish for

people." All kinds of analogies for evangelism have been developed around the theme of fishing. Evangelism, like fishing requires patience, lots of approaches (bait), willingness to go where the fish are, etc., etc.

Here's what we need to remember when we hear this story about Jesus saying, *Follow me, and I'll make you fish for people*. He was starting a conversation with *fishermen*.

Fishing was what they knew and did best. And Jesus begins right there: not with what *he* knows but with what *they* know. To these fishermen he says, *Follow me, you fishermen, and I'll make you fish-for-men*.

Today we are going to ordain two of our own church members as deacons. And I hope it serves as a reminder today for all of us of how God calls each of us to serve and to ministry. And we need to notice here that Jesus' call to each of us begins with what we know. It begins with what we do best.

*Follow me, you fishing-people, and I will make you fish-for-people*. Amazing, isn't it? Before Simon and Andrew hear a word about what's involved in this following, Jesus is reassuring them that they can do it, because it is not so different from what they have already done. In fact, they already have several of the job skills involved. They just have to adapt what they know.

The calling of God is not for you to become something that you are not. For you to respond to the calling of God is not for you to engage in some task or behavior that is alien to you.

I think we need to hear this today. Jesus say, *Follow me, and I'll make you fish for people*. I may not be the only one here today who doesn't fish. But that doesn't let me off the hook, so to speak. The point of this story is not that God has put out a sign that says: *Help Wanted: Fishermen Only*. Jesus happened to be talking to fishermen. But Jesus talks to you, too. He calls you, too. He says:

*Follow me, you cooks and chefs and butchers and bakers, and I will make you season and leaven and serve and preserve more than food.*

*Follow me, you insurance agents, and I will make you insure God's agency.*

*Follow me, you instrumentalists, and I will make you instrumental to others.*

*Follow me, carpenters, and I will make you build people.*

*Follow me, accountants, and I will make you help people know they count.*

*Follow me, waitresses, and I will make you serve the spiritual hunger of people.*

*Follow me, doctors and nurses, and I will make you a healer of people's souls.*

*Follow me, parents, and I will make you raise up children of God.*

*Follow me, investment planners, and I will make you invest in the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus says: *Follow me, you friends, you parents, you children, you siblings, you neighbors, you strangers, you hosts and guests, and I will make you all these things—to every other human being, for my sake.*

[Anna Carter Florence, *Lectionary Homiletics*, 2008]

That's why it's not as hard as you might think to respond to Jesus' call. You can do it. You are equipped to do it. Jesus always starts where you already are.

You don't have to respond to Jesus' call. You can stay right where you are and just fish for only fish. Cook only food. Insure only homes and cars. Play only an instrument. Build only a house. Count only money. Serve only food. Prescribe only medicine. Raise only your kids. Invest only people's money. And that's OK. There's certainly nothing wrong with any of those things. Those are all good things.

Or... you can say yes to Jesus. You can follow him. You can take what you do and what you know and allow God to give it a whole new meaning, deeper meaning, to give you a more significant vocation even though you never change jobs.

What will you say, what will you do, when Jesus asks you to take what you have, take what you know, take what you do,

and give it to his cause and use it to follow him? It's a little scary, I know.

C. S. Lewis describes responding to Jesus' call to follow him like this. It is like an unborn chick inside the egg. The chick is comfortable and unchallenged. The egg contains some nutrients for its sustenance, but they will soon be depleted. The chick must choose: stay in the egg and die or adventure out and live.

The shell must be cracked from the inside. And in so doing, it enters an entirely new world. This world, though new to the chick and a little scary, is the world for which it is made.