

ABANDON SHIP

Joshua Ashton Hill
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I speak to you in the name of God.
Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to Simon and Andrew,
“Follow me I’ll make you
fishers of people.” So immediately
they followed.

Fishing for people.
Hmmm...I have always been
troubled by this phrase. It seems like
only yesterday my grandfather and I got
into the cab of that rusty old Ford
pickup truck. A bench seat, carpet
upholstery worn thin, a crack stretching
the length of the windshield.
It smelled like work. Grease from
fixing tractors and dirt from the farm
blended in the air with the smell of
5,000 chickens. And just past the
chicken houses, where the dirt road
becomes simply a field of tall grass, the
old navy blue Ford starts creaking and
bouncing as we drive off road, toward
the pond where I learned how fish.

Two cane poles. Two Bobbers. Two
hooks. And a repurposed butter tub
full of earth and earth worms.

Nightcrawlers. I had overcome my fear
of baiting the hook, but, despite my
grandfather’s gentle teasing, I remained
timid about removing a fish from the
hook. I didn’t like touching fish. And
I didn’t like the thought that I was
torturing it, slowly suffocating it by
holding it out of water. And running a
stringer through its gill. I certainly
couldn’t bear the thought of cleaning it.

You may understand these
reservations. So you might appreciate
why I was deeply disturbed as a child
when my preacher told me that Jesus
would make me fish for people. I
could just imagine reeling in a big one,
taking him off the hook, murdering
him slowly, and chopping off his
head...for Jesus. Carpenters shouldn’t
make fishing metaphors. The Gospel
is not rooted in deception and captivity

and torture. That's not what it means to fish for people. Quite the opposite actually.

Jesus is calling us to know and share the life of liberation and abundance of hope. That's what all disciples should do. That's why we are here today. Being a disciple means fishing for people. Fishing for people means evangelizing. Ergo, being a disciple means evangelizing. It is the mission of this parish to make disciples. Are you starting to sweat? Never fear. Let's talk about evangelism... It just means living your life in such a way that other people can see God. So you need not be a loudmouth or a TV evangelist. You need not a \$400 haircut. We each must learn how to become our own unique style of evangelist. Because sharing the good news of Jesus will only be as effective as it is a genuine reflection of God's work in our lives. Being a fisher for people is not a deceptive task, but a creative, exciting, liberating dance. It's about doing something bold, energizing, enlivening, and new. But first, it means that we must drop our nets and follow. It means that we abandon ship. Reject the obsolete versions of our life plans. Pursue a new way of life. A healthy vision of community grounded in praise and mutual flourishing. It means we commit ourselves to serving others.

This is not always an easy decision to make. Especially when we think too much about it. The costs start adding

up. There are costs associated with discipleship. Being a disciple does require us to drop our nets. Maybe even leave what is dear. James and John left their father. But let us not forget this is good news. We must drop old nets if we are to cast new ones. We have to let go of whatever we cling to if our hands are to be open enough to receive something new. It is common for theologians to talk about the costs of discipleship. And that's an important point in a culture where Christianity is mainstream and discipleship starts looking like political power. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously made this critique of Nazi Germany.

But in a culture where it's becoming harder and harder to find a Christian... Instead of preaching the cost of discipleship, perhaps we should proclaim the benefits of discipleship. It is here that we encounter the good news, that God wants to do a new thing in our lives. That God constantly wants us to become somebody new. I did a little digging in the gospel in Greek. And I found something interesting that our translation leaves out. The King James gets it right. The Greek doesn't say I will make you fishers. It says I will make you *become* fishers. Becoming is the good news. God is constantly calling us to become something more than we are.

Today's invitation to repentance is an invitation to look to the horizon with hope that, investing our whole selves to the service of God in Jesus, we might

become somebody. We might grow into new, better, happier, more alive people who are the salt of our communities. Jesus says to each of us this morning: “Drop your nets. Abandon ship. And follow me instead. Follow me. I will show you what it means to be made in the image of God. I will transform you. I will make you *You*. I will make your soul sing. Come after me. Participate in my work. It will heal you.”

If sounds theoretical, I want to give you a real life example of a disciple. Someone who dropped the net of personal ambition, abandoned the ship of his desire for recognition and acclaim so he could follow the call of Jesus to begin a career of service to others. I am talking about Martin Luther King Junior. I’m going to conclude by reading the conclusion of one of King’s all time great sermons called “The Drum Major Instinct” It’s a phenomenal window into the thoughts of a true disciple.

Throughout the sermon King explains that we all inherently have an instinct or a drive to be recognized. To rise to acclaim. To be popular. To be great. To be Loved. To be dissatisfied just being in the band. We want to be the drum major. This drum major instinct shows up in our concern for appearance, the clothes we wear, the houses we buy, the cars we drive, the way we act at social gatherings, how our kids are taught to behave. King

says we do these things typically not because we want to serve the world, but we do these things so we can look great. In hopes that people will remember our greatness. King said that to follow Christ, we had to drop that net and follow a new path to true greatness. One where those who exalt themselves will be humbled but those who humble themselves will be exalted. Where greatness is not limited to those with the right credentials. But greatness means giving your life in the service of others. Anyone can be great, he famously said, because anyone can serve. And here’s how he ended that famous sermon, (I quote until the end):

“Every now and then I think about my own death and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. And every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" And I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don’t want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize—that isn’t important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards—that’s not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school.

I'd like somebody to mention that day
that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to
give his life serving others.

I'd like for somebody to say that day
that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to
love somebody.

I want you to say that day that I tried to
be right on the war question.

I want you to be able to say that day
that I did try to feed the hungry.

And I want you to be able to say that
day that I did try in my life to clothe
those who were naked.

I want you to say on that day that I did
try in my life to visit those who were in
prison.

I want you to say that I tried to love
and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to say that I was a
drum major, say that I was a drum
major for justice. Say that I was a drum
major for peace. I was a drum major
for righteousness. And all of the other
shallow things will not matter. I won't
have any money to leave behind. I
won't have the fine and luxurious
things of life to leave behind. But I just
want to leave a committed life behind.

And that's all I want to say.”

Amen.