

January 26, 2014

## GONE ICE FISHING

When I woke up this morning and noticed 9 degrees below zero reading, I thought I was back in Minnesota. Cold weather seems to unite us with one common bond. Last year, I told you a Lena and Ole joke about ice fishing. I thought you might remember it. Here is different icebreaker joke to start this sermon. I hope no one takes offense but it pokes a little fun at southern folks instead of blonde-haired women.

A Southerner visiting his relatives in Upstate New York wanted to experience ice fishing.

So after getting all of the right tools, he headed toward the nearest frozen lake. After getting comfy on his stool, he started to cut a circular hole in the ice.

Then from the sky a voice boomed, "THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE." Startled, the novice fisherman moved further down the ice, poured a thermos of hot chocolate and started to cut yet another hole in the ice.

The voice boomed, "THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE." This time quite scared, the guy moved to the far end of the ice. Then he started another hole and once again, the voice said, "THERE ARE NO FISH UNDER THE ICE."

The very scared man raised his head and said, "Is that you, Lord?"

The voice answered, "NO. IT IS THE MANAGER OF THE ICE RINK." (Adapted from icefishermenjokes.com)

On this chilly January morning, our Gospel lesson takes us to the fishing port of Capernaum. A larger city than Nazareth, Capernaum was a busy fishing port on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Isaiah passage refers to that territory, where the highway from the Mediterranean coast leads to Damascus. Capernaum is mentioned more often in the NT than any other city. Jesus called Andrew, Peter, James and John from their jobs as fishermen. Jesus taught preached in the synagogue (Jn 6: 24) and here Peter found the coin from the mouth of the fish upon the command of Jesus to pay the tax gatherers (Matthew 17: 24). For a while Jesus lived with Peter and his family in their Capernaum house. In fact, recent archeological digs have discovered first century houses that most likely resemble Peter's home right under the Byzantine church that is believed to be his house.

I don't know about you, but this changes my image of what it means to "leave everything behind" to follow Jesus. Peter as well as other followers opened their homes to Jesus. The disciples had families, homes and communities that they lived in. Didn't Jesus heal Peter's mother-in law? Jesus also returned to Mary and Martha house to raise the sisters' brother and his good friend, Lazarus. Why is this important? Because there is a misconception that those who followed Jesus cut all ties to home, family and community. There is a misconception that we, as Christians cannot measure up to the disciples' example. That somehow, the original 12 disciples were extraordinary and we can never be like them. I believe that is not true or accurate. There is a study on Christian vocation funded by the Lily

Endowment. The perplexing conclusions caused me to rethink my message to you. First, graduates “of the five institutions involved (Catholic Theological Union, Duke Divinity School, Fuller Seminary, Princeton Seminary, and Luther Seminary) all reported that “vocation” was a significant category in their teaching and preaching. Not all that perplexing, you might say; and I would agree -- this was all to the good! 2) At the same time, however, it turned out that most members of the congregations they serve do not feel called. Most of the folks listening to our preaching and teaching on vocation, that is, do not see most of what they do outside of the church as worthy of God’s attention and interest. (Fishers of People by David Lose)

How does this happen? Preacher and ministers are lifted up as extraordinary; answering a call, we cannot answer. Saints of the church seem to have given everything away, sacrificed it all to serve. They must have some extraordinary abilities; they must exist on a higher spiritual plane. It is dangerous territory, you can see already.

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Honestly, it the ordinary, everyday person who sings in the choir, brings food to someone who is ill, chairs a committee and attends worship regularly is not considered a saint. In our faith understanding, we are all called. If we believe, just believe we are part of the Body of Christ. United in baptism and faith.

*Jesus called ordinary people right in the middle of their ordinary lives to be in relationship with the ordinary people all around them and through that did extraordinary things ... and he still does.*

The reality is we all juggle our family life, our personal social obligations, and our work life and faith involvement. Yesterday at Gary Braun’s memorial service, a long time business partner and friend spoke highly of all that Gary had accomplished. At the very end, he told the story that when he invited Gary to go somewhere he explained that he needed to visit someone at the nursing home. Gary took his call as a deacon seriously.

Our call is to follow Christ’s Way wherever you live, wherever you work or play, wherever you are.

Today elders and deacons will be ordained and installed in this Presbyterian Church. They are ordinary people called in the middle of ordinary lives to follow Christ’s Way.

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