

This morning's Gospel is about fishing—something many of you may be familiar with. Maybe you have gone fishing at a cottage, on a camping trip, or maybe even as part of the fishing industry. Or maybe your only experience with fishing is that little card game called "Go Fish" or having tossed your line in at one of the CNE fishing booths.

The best fish I ever caught was when I was about 13 or 14. I was at a friend's cottage in Haliburton. His Dad had taken us out trolling. We hadn't been out long when I felt a few nibbles, and then a huge tug.

After what seemed like forever, but was probably only a few minutes, I pulled in a beautiful Lake Trout—which as I remember was probably about this big!

Okay, maybe this big.

Since then, I've gone fishing many times—lots of nibbles, plenty of little sunfish and rock bass, even a snapping turtle once—but never another big fish like that.

The Clickbait Trap

Fishing involves waiting and hoping, and very often waiting and hoping without anything to show for our time.

But in today's digital world, that waiting, for many, has been replaced with the need for instant gratification.

We live in a time where we are constantly being baited by headlines, social media posts, political rhetoric and cultural narratives that offer big promises, sensational claims, and the allure of quick solutions.

Have you ever started scrolling on your phone or the computer for a simple piece of information—maybe for an address, or to check the weather, or to plan your next vacation—only to be met with:

- "10 Secrets to Instant Wealth!"
- "One Simple Trick That Will Change Your Life!"

This clickbait, as we call it, is designed to grab our attention, provoke a reaction, and draw us in.

Whether its in Canada, or as has been painfully obvious south of the border, in recent weeks, we see this clickbait pretty much everywhere.

- With politicians baiting us with fear and outrage.
- Media baiting us with half-truths and sensationalism.
- Social movements luring us in with division and identity politics.
- And even churches can sometimes bait people with their offers of comfort without conviction or legalism without grace.

With all this bait circling around our heads – how are we supposed to know which one to take?

Luke 5:1-11 – Jesus Offers a Different Bait

In Luke 5:1-11, Jesus invites His first disciples—Peter, James, and John—to join Him. These men were professionals. They knew the water. They knew the fish. But they had fished all night and caught nothing.

Then Jesus tells Peter: "Let's go out a bit further. Put your nets down in the deep water and let's see what you catch."

Peter hesitates. He could easily have dismissed Jesus. "What kind of invitation is that?" Peter must have thought. After all, who is the expert here? Jesus was a carpenter, not a fisherman.

And yet, Peter says, "Jesus, because you say so, I will let down the nets."

And suddenly, the nets were filled to overflowing. So full they began to break. So heavy they needed help from another boat to haul everything in. So miraculous that Peter falls to his knees, realizing that he's in the presence of someone far greater than he had imagined.

"Lord," says Peter, "get away from me. I am so full of sin."

In essence, Peter is saying he's not worthy, he doesn't deserve this, he's not good enough."

"Don't be afraid, Peter," says Jesus. "Don't take that bait. You are. You are good enough. You are good enough to fish people ... for me."

The Wrong Bait: What the World is Offering

Like Simon Peter, we often rely on old bait, on the old ways of doing things, on the things that used to work for us in the past. We rely on our skills, our expertise, our best judgement. But sometimes that bait stops working. And to be honest, sometimes it wasn't the best bait in the first place. Let look for a minute at some of that bait floating around in society.

1. A big one is the bait of political ideology

How many times have we heard things like this:

- "If we get the right person elected, the right mayor or the right Prime Minister, things will turn around."
- "If we pass this law, everything will be better."
- "If the other side wins, we're doomed."

Statements like this suggest that politics can save us—they are intended to convince us that a leader, party, or policy can fix everything that is broken in the world.

Now, don't get me wrong—politics matter. Leadership matters. Justice matters. But when we believe they are the only things that matter, we have taken the wrong bait. The truth is that:

- No political party fully represents God's reign on earth.
- No political ideology can usher in Utopia.
- No leader is perfect.
- And no law on its own can change the human heart.

Think about J.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. At the center of the story is the One Ring, and that Ring represents ultimate power. It's alluring, it's seductive, and it promises that whoever wields it will have the ability to bring peace and order to the world.

Boromir and even Frodo believe—at least for a time—that if they can just control the Ring, they can use its power for good. Boromir especially argues that if he just had the Ring, he could use it to defeat the forces of evil.

What he doesn't yet understand is that the Ring doesn't just give strength - it also corrupts anyone who tries to wield its strength. The recurring theme throughout the story is that the real battle is not for control of the Ring, but control of the heart.

The early church didn't grow because they had the right emperor in power. It grew because those who followed Jesus lived differently, loved radically, and preached the gospel boldly.

The bait of political ideology says:

"If we get this person in office, everything will change."

Jesus says "Follow Me, and I will change the world through you."

2. The Bait of Tribalism

Another bait the world throws at us in tribalism. This idea suggests that we need to pick a side and treat the other side as the enemy. This us vs. them way of thinking pushes us to divide the

- Left and the Right
- Conservatives and Progressives
- Whites and Blacks
- Settlers and First Nations
- Straight and Gay
- And Rich vs. Poor

If we're not careful, it's easy to take that bait—believing that it's impossible to find some middle ground and even worse that God is only on our side.

Jesus refuses to play by these rules.

He calls a tax collector named Matthew and a Zealot named Peter to be His disciples—two men whose politics definitely would not have aligned.

He crosses cultural boundaries to talk to a Samaritan woman at the well— someone Jews weren't supposed to associate with.

How many times in the Gospels do we hear Jesus praying for unity. Why? Because a divided church cannot reach a divided world.

The bait of tribalism says: "Stick with your own. Reject everyone else." Jesus says: "Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you."

3. The Bait of Fear-Based Narratives

The last bait I'd like to talk about this morning is that of fear. We live in a world where fear is constantly dangled in front of us like bait. It's designed to pull us into panic, division, and hopelessness. No doubt you have heard statements like:

- "Christianity is under attack!"
- "The Church is dying"
- "If we don't act now, we'll lose our country!"
- "The world is falling apart!"

To be honest—there are challenges - real challenges in our world.

- There are moral and ethical dilemmas that threaten the fabric of society.
- Faith, freedom, and truth often do feel like they are under siege.
- Global crises, political instability, and social upheaval are real.
- And all of them are frightening.

But here's the problem: Fear-based narratives exaggerate, manipulate, and distract us from what truly matters. When they become the dominant story it's easy to feel defeated and

hopeless

Fear

as a Weapon

Fear is one of the most effective tools that can be used to control people. It clouds our judgment, fuels division, and drives people into a fight-or-flight way of living. In the Harry Potter stories, fear is Voldemort's most powerful weapon. Voldemort gains strength by spreading fear, so much so that people are even afraid to speak his name.

So, what does the Headmaster Dumbledore tell Harry? "Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself."

"Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself."

Isn't that what we see today? The more we focus on what we fear, the more power we give it. Fear distorts reality. It makes our challenges seem insurmountable and our enemies appear larger than life.

Fear baits us to believe that.

- "We have to fight for control."
- "We have to take matters into our own hands."
- "That the world is too broken, and not even God can't fix it."

When we take this bait:

- Our fear makes us react instead of reflect.
- It tries to tell us we need to take this on all on our own.
- Fear itself becomes a false god, dictating our actions and decisions.

A faith that is driven by fear is no faith at all. It's simply a response to the bait the world dangles in front of us.

The Right Bait: What Jesus Offers

So, what are we to do? Are we just supposed to sit back and ignore the world's problems? Are we supposed to retreat from the noise, the fear, the anger, and pretend it doesn't exist? Are we supposed to disengage from politics, culture, and the issues of our time? The answer is no. Jesus doesn't call us to disengage from the world—He calls us to engage with it differently.

He calls us to load our up our tackle box with different bait and get rid of those that lead to division, fear, and deception.

Look at what Jesus offered.

He didn't lure people in with flashy promises or manipulate them with fear. In the story we read this morning he doesn't even promise anything. All he said was "listen to me." Let's go out a little bit deeper, put down the nets, and see what happens.

Instead, of flashy, over-inflated, unfulfilling promises Jesus offers:

1. Truth instead of deception
Jesus always spoke truth—even when it was hard to hear. He didn't rely on half-truths or sensationalism to get attention. He spoke truth to power in a way that was grounded in love and grace.
2. Jesus us grace, not outrage
While the world baits us to react with anger and outrage, Jesus calls us to respond with grace. When people came to him with accusations, he didn't escalate the conflict - he extended compassion. Even when he called out sin, he followed it with forgiveness.
3. Jesus held up Hope, not fear
The world loves not only to feed our fears, but to feed off them. In a culture obsessed with worst-case scenarios, Jesus reminds us of a world where place where love, justice, and peace can take hold. He gives us a vision of what could be, of what can be - instead of trapping us in what we fear.
4. Finally, Jesus spoke of unity, not division
Jesus came to break down walls of hostility—not build them up. He crossed social, cultural, and political boundaries to bring people together. Where the world divides, Jesus unites.

Today the church observes the Feast of St. David of Wales, a 6th-century monk and bishop, who understood these values.

In the days before his own death, he gathered his followers together and said to them: "Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things you have seen and heard me do."

"Do the little things."

In a world obsessed with big bait—big promises, big movements, big controversies—Jesus

invites us to the little things that make a real difference.

Think about Peter. Jesus didn't call him to build an empire or win a culture war—He simply said, "Put down your nets." A small act of obedience that led to an abundant miracle.

What if, instead of being drawn into the latest outrage, the biggest debate, the most shocking headline, we focused on the small acts of love and faithfulness—caring for a neighbor, showing grace to someone we disagree with, praying instead of panicking, loving instead of tearing down?

Jesus calls us not to clickbait promises, but to faithfulness—to the small things done in love that, in God’s hands, can change the world.

Friends, there is little doubt that the clickbait we’ve witnessed and are witnessing will continue. It will keep tempting us, hook, line and sinker with its sensational headlines, its divisive narratives, and its fear driven promises.

But this morning Jesus invites us away from those shallow promises to deeper waters. Like Peter, James, and John, Jesus invites us, away from some of our deeply ingrained patterns to a life that may seem new and even a little bit frightening.

He invites us to something different. He invites us to give up our old nets of expertise, pride, tradition, comfort, and stability that we’ve become accustomed to. He calls us to give up the steady diet of promises that initially taste so good but ultimately leave us hungry, angry and fearful.

Jesus urges us to push out into the deep with offers of love and grace, hope and unity - so that the clamour of other voices don’t seem quite as loud.

He is calling us to be fishers of people – because in the end that’s the only thing that really matters to Jesus.

People

Every single one.

And every single time.