

Reading: Mark 1:14-20, Jonah 3:1-5
Date Preached: Sunday, January 22, 2006
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford
Preacher: Rev. Sheldon Gattinger
sheldon.gattinger@gmail.com

Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

You might be wondering to yourselves right now why Pastor Sheldon looks like Captain Highliner from the fish stick boxes!

I will get to that in a moment...

Today in our gospel reading, we hear Christ calling his first apostles. We are told that as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16), he sees Simon and his brother Andrew casting fishing nets into the sea.

To these fishermen Christ says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mk 1:17) Needless to say, that this request of Christ came out of the blue to them. After all, they were just happily minding their own business fishing when this stranger comes out of nowhere and challenges them to leave what they are doing to follow him and "fish for people."

So how do Simon and Andrew respond to this challenge? Well, we are told that Simon and Andrew "immediately" left their nets to follow Jesus.

Today, as we gather to celebrate "It's Your Call Sunday", Christ challenges us with no less of a command than he issued to Simon and Andrew (Matt 28:18-19). Since I am one of these guys that take the Bible pretty seriously, I try to live out Christ's words in my own life. Since Christ has called us to fish for people, I thought that I better be prepared. That is why I am standing here today wearing my fishing gear. If Christ says that I am going to fish- then I am going to be ready to fish!

Chest waders? Check.
Fishing Vest? Check.
Lucky fishing hat? Check.
Fishing Rod? Check.

Ok Jesus, I am ready to fish for people...

Of course, I think that we all know that this isn't going to work. Why? Easy...I am going to fail in my quest to fish for people because I have the wrong tools. While I might be prepared to catch monster northern pike or even walleye- I am woefully unprepared to "catch" any people.

Just like one needs the right equipment for fishing, one needs the right equipment for ministry.

While chest waders, and a silly hat might be good for fishing- they are not the best tools to use for ministry.

So just what tools do we need for ministry? How do we go about equipping ourselves for ministry so that we can follow Christ's call to "fish for people"?

To equip us for ministry in this world, God has blessed us with many gifts. He has given us the gift of faith, the Holy Spirit, peace, love, and understanding. And, of course, God has gifted us all in our own unique ways (1 Cor. 7:7).

Today, as we gather together and celebrate "It's Your Call" Sunday we celebrate our divine blessings and giftedness as God's people in this world. I know for a fact that each person here (from the youngest to the oldest) has gifts for ministry. And today- as you look around church and see some of the various ministries and services that we are involved in here at Zion- I both encourage you (and like Christ) challenge you to put your gifts to work for the glory of God. (P.S. I also guarantee that whatever ministries you lend your name to, I will not make you dress up and stand in front of the church foolishly-that is my job.)

As we talk about our gifts and our calling to ministry, I thought I would share with you how I became a pastor. Many people have asked me how it is that I became a minister as well as asking how God called me...

I suppose my story (like everyone's) goes back to the beginning (Psalm 139:13). I was born Sheldon Wayne Gattinger to Mel and Bonnie Gattinger on January 19, 1976. I was the product of a German Lutheran father and a Norwegian Lutheran mother.

Like many Christian children I attended Sunday school and church with my parents. As I hit those awkward pre-teen years, I grudgingly did my stint in Confirmation. Throughout this whole period of my youth there was no indication that I was to be a minister. Professional hockey player, international millionaire- yes; pastor-no.

And then, out of the blue, something transformational happened to me...

One nice winter day in February, My best friend and I went out to Long Lake to ice fish for the afternoon. It was a pretty slow fishing day, and we were relaxing and enjoying the nice weather when he asked me if I wanted one of his mother's homemade chocolates. I said, "sure". So he gave me one.

Unfortunately, his mother had put hazel nuts in the center of her chocolates. And, as it turns out, I am allergic to nuts- deathly allergic. In a matter of seconds after biting down on the chocolate, my face had swollen, and my throat had begun to close tight. I was going through (what I later learned) was anaphylactic shock. Now my friend, realizing that something was not right, rolled me into the truck and raced for the hospital. There was only one problem- we were on the middle of Long Lake and were over an hour away from the closest hospital!

As we sped down the road, my situation continued to worsen. Quickly I was having to fight and struggle for every breath. In a matter of minutes, I could no longer breathe.

And that is when it happened...I know some of you will look at me skeptically when I say this, but it is at this point that God talked to me. Now God didn't use words or even lightening bolts from heaven, but nevertheless he still talked loudly to me.

If you can picture with me for a moment, me and my friend hurdling down the highway together with me puffed-up like a blowfish quickly dying in the passenger seat, and it is here that God reached out to me.

All of a sudden in the midst of all this chaos, confusion, and fear I felt at peace and safe. Though I cannot describe it, I knew that whether I lived or died that afternoon- I was loved and cared for. In the midst of this storm, God had given me that "peace which passes all understanding".

To make a long story short, we eventually arrived at the hospital, my heart had stopped beating, the doctors and nurse revived me, and two days later I went home.

But I didn't just go home healed I went home changed. God had stirred my soul and awakened my faith. Over the course of days, weeks, months, and years I talked with pastors, read everything I could get my hands on, and prayed.

Eventually by the time I had graduated from high school, I knew that I was being called by God to be a pastor.

And now to make an even longer story short, I spend 9 years in University/Seminary, got married to my loving wife Lorelee, did internship in Toronto, and served in Kyle for two and one-half years for my first call.

And now God has worked again in my life, as he has called us to be together in ministry and me to be looking silly this morning wearing rubber waders and a funny hat. Amazing how God works, isn't it?

And today, the deacons of this church and myself are asking you to prayerfully consider how God has gifted you and calling you to ministry.

Together, we are the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11ff). God gifts us and calls us to work together as his feet, his hands, his heart, and his body in the world.

So this morning, as we hear Christ's call to ministry I say, "Thanks be to God" and "Thanks be to you". Amen