

BE GREAT BAIT

Mark 1:14-20 [MW21-03]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 17 January 2021

When I was a curate in Taupo, the organist, Michael Drake, invited us to go fishing on the lake with him. His family had a long association with boating on Lake Taupo. I guess with a surname like "Drake" it's almost obligatory to be involved with boats! Anyway we met him down at the wharf and set off across the lake on their classic motor boat the "Sir Francis". We made our way out to what Michael thought was a likely spot and he began getting things ready. As he was preparing the hooks and lures and lines our daughter Amy, who was four, watched him very intently. She asked him what he was doing and Michael, who was a school teacher, very patiently explained about the equipment and what it was for. Amy kept questioning as only an energetic and interested four year old can; and kept asking: "Why?". "Why are you doing all this?" And the answer from Michael was: "to catch a fish." Finally it was all set and Michael put the lines out behind the boat. We trolled along for half an hour or so and then Michael began bringing the lines in. As he did Amy stood right next to him watching very intently. She looked at the lines that had been wound in on the boat; she looked at the lines yet to come out of the lake. Nothing! She looked up at Michael and asked: "Why didn't you catch a fish?" Probably not the best thing to say to a fisherman who has put in a heap of effort that has resulted in no trout!

In spite of everything I really enjoy fishing

- I just don't seem to be particularly good at it getting the same result we had on the lake that day
- when we used to holiday up at Coopers beach during January I would go down to the wharf most days with my rod and lines
- the last time I went I had lots of nibbles and some really strong bites I didn't loose my line even one time
- I did manage to catch two starfish one of which was something a bit special apparently being bigger and usually found only on coral
- my son said he thought catching starfish is more difficult than catching fish so that's a pretty good effort
- but I'm not so sure: at the end of the day I didn't bring home any fish for dinner

I was given this [hold up new 'tackle box']

- it's really cool: the top opens like this and then you let down the front and there are all these boxes that slide in and out and have adjustable compartments
- it came with all this interesting stuff and there is plenty of space to put the swivels, hooks, sinkers I already had and plenty of space to put more stuff

I love having everything neatly ordered

- I love getting things out and getting prepared to go fishing getting the rod and lines ready making up the different rigs attaching the sinkers, hooks, lures ...
- but that is not going to end up with me having fish for dinner I'm missing something ... actually I'm missing two things

First, the fish aren't going to come to me

- I have to make an effort
I have to physically go to where the fish are
- but even when I do that
even when I take this cool fishing box and my rod
and actually go down to the wharf
- I still need one more thing: what is it I need???

Bait – I need bait

- it doesn't matter how much fancy gear I have
if there is no bait

Up at the Mangonui wharf

- I noticed you could have two people fishing right next to each other
and one would catch a fish, and one would not
- what was the difference?
bait!
- one day the fish seemed to prefer soft bait
another day they preferred live bait
one day squid, the next day tua tuas or shrimp ...

In our Gospel reading today Jesus said to four fishermen

- “come with me and I will show you how to fish for people”
“come with me and I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish”
- in most images we have of fishing the idea is to 'trick' the fish
so that it gets hooked
- and that's an image many people have of the Christian faith:
that being a follower of Jesus is being hooked, tricked, duped - like a fish
that one minute you are going along fine, then you get sucked in
- you get hooked and taken somewhere you don't want to be
caught in Jesus' net, hooked by Jesus
and that takes all the fun out of life
- in fact it takes the “life” out of life

Is that the case?

- is that what you think?
is that what you experience???

Thinking about all this – what is the job of “bait”?

- [space for answers]
- to attract fish!

So may be that is what Jesus is saying to us here this morning

- our job is to be “bait”
to attract people so they see Jesus
- may be our job is to be where people are
and be great bait

And remember, what we are attracting people to is not a 'sticky end'

- we are attracting people in fact to the exact opposite
not to someone and something that takes the fun out of life
- but to the one person that puts "life" into life!

There is nothing "fishy" about this

- it is very straight up and straight forward

So, how might we be "great bait" ...

- please take a moment or two and consider this
how can we be good bait???

[PP Slide]

[space for reflection]

Let's see what we can come up with ...

- answers

- for me it has much to do with our attitude
how we treat other people, relationships
- how we live
the way we react to difficulties
- our generosity
sharing and caring
- and doing and being all this where people are

This is something that has always been at the heart of those living the Christian life

- inspired by the one whom they follow
it shines in their lives and was what enabled the church to grow
- here is something from the history of the early church:

Many historians believe that central to the rise of Christianity was the simple fact that Christians generously loved each other and their neighbours. They point out that in the ancient world mercy was widely seen as a character defect that ran counter to justice. Justice demanded people get what they deserved and was seen as appropriate, where mercy extended grace, love, and kindness to people who had done nothing to deserve it. Yet the Christians valued mercy. Christian communities became places where people tended to live longer and healthier lives, for when they suffered sickness, poverty or mishap they had brothers and sisters in Christ who provided for their need. And Christians extended love way beyond the boundaries of family and congregation to their pagan neighbours.

In 251 A.D. for example, a great plague struck the Greco-Roman world. Memories were revived of a plague a century earlier in which more than a third of the population died. Fear was everywhere. Those who could afford it fled to the countryside. Those who could not remained in the cities. When they went to the temples they found them empty, the priests having fled. The streets were filled with those who had become infected, their families left with no option but to push them out the door. Christian communities however took an entirely different approach. They saw it as their responsibility to love the sick and dying, so they took them into their homes and nursed them. This action meant that many people recovered who otherwise would have died. Historians suggest that elementary nursing could have reduced the mortality rate by as much as two thirds, but it also cost a number of Christian carers their lives.

In the early church, the practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'see how these Christians love one another' was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war.

The way Christians, followers of Jesus, lived and related and cared and shared

- attracted people to the church and to becoming followers of Jesus themselves
we have the opportunity to do the same
right here, right now
- with the people we find ourselves living, working, relaxing with
day by day

Please note: we are the exact opposite of contemporary advertising

- which promises all kinds things to hook people in
yes, advertising does in a very real way set out to trick people
- on the other hand we just want people to stop and look
and see Jesus, the one who guides our lives
- the rest is up to them, and Jesus

All you have to do is:

- be where people are
and BE GREAT BAIT!