

*Finest Bread I Will Provide*

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Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009

I want to set the record straight ... I am not the world's greatest fisherman. Not by a long shot. However, I do know people in this church who can fish my socks off ... my mother for one has always been the top fisherwoman in my family ... and Steve Erickson, here behind me, lives, breathes and dies for fishing.

But I do have my share of fish stories. I remember one particular time when I was a wee lad growing up in pre-Disney Florida ... we were fishing one of the lakes near Kissimmee. My father selected the lures for that trip ... live shiners ... we were going after large-mouth bass. Four of us in a little motor boat ... Dad, Mom, my sister who was bored out of her mind ... and I ... casting out into the waters.

I got the first strike ... and it was a big one ... he was jumping and splashing and doing everything in his or her power to get rid of my hook ... and just as that monster fish came along side of the boat ... it slipped the hook and was gone in a flash. I couldn't believe it ... that fish was at least as big as a ... well, I don't know ... but it was big. And it got away. For the rest of the day, I kept reminding everyone ... if they caught that fish ... it was my fish ... I got it first.

Now you might remember that Jesus was the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. But did you know, that deep in his heart, he had always wished he'd grown up alongside of the Sea of Galilee so he could be a fisherman? After all ... look how much time he ends up spending on that body of water or walking around it ... or preaching from a boat anchored on the shoreline. And why do you think he picked at least four fisherman to join him as his disciples ... that's right ... he wanted to also pick their brains on how to fish ... what lures to use ... and where were the best places to cast the net.

In his heart, Jesus really was a fisherman. In our Gospel reading from John this morning, Jesus is having a conversation with a group of folks who aren't buying his claim that he is the Messiah ... the chosen one of God who will deliver the Jewish people. He's just Jesus ... the son of carpenter from Nazareth ... his mother is Mary ... they know them. Jesus isn't anything special.

But Jesus ... as you will hear ... keeps right on casting his line ... maybe you'll be hooked this morning. Our reading is from the sixth chapter, verse 35 and 41 to 51. I will be reading from Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible, *The Messenger*. Listen for ... and feel the tug of God's line on your heart.

6:35 Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever.

6:41 At this, because he said, "I am the Bread that came down from heaven," the Jews started arguing over him:

6:42 "Isn't this the son of Joseph? Don't we know his father? Don't we know his mother? How

can he now say, 'I came down out of heaven' and expect anyone to believe him?"

6:43 Jesus said, "Don't bicker among yourselves over me.

6:44 You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me—that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet, ready for the End.

6:45 This is what the prophets meant when they wrote, 'And then they will all be personally taught by God.' Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to the Father, really listening and therefore learning, comes to me to be taught personally—to see it with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, from me, since I have it firsthand from the Father.

6:46 No one has seen the Father except the One who has his Being alongside the Father—and you can see me.

6:47 "I'm telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life.

6:48 I am the Bread of Life.

6:49 Your ancestors ate the manna bread in the desert and died.

6:50 But now here is Bread that truly comes down out of heaven. Anyone eating this Bread will not die, ever.

6:51 I am the Bread—living Bread!—who came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this Bread will live—and forever! The Bread that I present to the world so that it can eat and live is myself, this flesh-and-blood self."

This is the word of our Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

This is the second in a series of three sermons ... what we are calling our “Bread of Life” series. Last Sunday we heard how the bread is the very “soul food” that feeds us the grace, love and hope of Jesus Christ. But this week ... well ... I think it is more of a fishing story.

Because in the heart of this passage is a word Jesus often uses in the gospel of John when talking about casting nets and fishing ... the word is *hel-ku-oo* ... it is a Greek verb meaning “to draw by inward power, to lead, to impel” (The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon).

As the passage begins ... Jesus is standing his ground with some folks who think they know everything there is to know about this carpenter’s son ... but he begins to teach them some new things about himself ... Jesus is breaking an old paradigm that focuses the people’s lives on the

Law of Moses ... by bringing a new paradigm into our world ... and this new paradigm has everything to do with the revelation about grace and love and truth from God.

That's when Jesus makes it quite clear in no uncertain terms ... "You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws ... he lures people to me ... that's the only way you'll ever come."

There's that verb Jesus is using ... as a metaphor ... as he draws people to God ... you might even say that Christ is using a fishing lure ... to draw us by an inward power ... to lead us to God ... to even impel us to come to him.

And that's not the only time the gospel writer uses the exact same verb ... it is used when Jesus talks about casting nets and drawing up the fish from the sea ... and, even more powerfully, it is used when Jesus tells his disciples ... "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32)

I can just picture all of us swimming in a great sea with all kinds of lures attached to lines trying to attract us ... it's a crowded sea with nets and lures of all kinds ... there's the lure of money ... the lure of power ... of prestige ... there's the lure of escape through addictions ... there's the lure toward lust ... there are all kinds of earthly lures that want to get their hooks into our hearts and then reel us right in.

But then ... right there in the middle of that great sea is another line ... with a lure attached to it ... it is the Word ... Christ Jesus ... and there is not a thing we can do to avoid that lure ... because, as we are reminded in the 18th chapter of Matthew when Jesus was talking about the one lost sheep ... "So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost." (Matthew 18:14) That one lure of God will find us ... and it will hook us ... but here's the tricky part. We still have a choice in the matter.

Even though there is no doubt in my mind that we are all lured ... impelled ... lead to God ... not all of us will take the "bait." Some of us ... like that big bass that got away from me ... will slip off that hook and take another bait. You see ... this isn't a passage promoting "universal salvation."

It is a passage in which Christ Jesus offers us the most wonderful gift we can ever be offered ... we can choose to accept it ... or reject it ... to believe in Christ as our Lord and Savior ... or simply turn and swim away. As the old saying goes ... you can lead a horse to water ... but you can't make him drink. It's called free will ... God also gave us that.

Now here's a way that you know that God's hook's got your heart.

If you find yourself compelled to lure others to know Christ through words or how you model your life ... if you are willing to share the Good News of the Gospel with someone ... if you ever find yourself explaining to someone why you believe in Jesus Christ ... if you ever feel deeply compelled to reach out to others when you feel the strong compassionate tug of justice and mercy in the name of Christ ... if you are willing to reach out to anyone ... not just people who

look and act the way you do ... but EVERYONE ... then I strongly suspect you've got Christ in your heart ... hook, line and sinker.

That's when your life is led as Paul tells us to live our lives from our reading from Ephesians ... "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."

Because once you're hooked ... Christ will use you as a fisherman or fisherwoman to get out there and cast your line ... to throw out your nets ... to bring others the Good News ... to feed others the Bread of Life ... not because you have to ... not because it's a requirement to being a Christian ... but because it's just the most wonderful thing you can ever imagine doing as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But that also makes it one of the hardest things you will ever do. You see ... it's easy to act like a Christian ... you can come to church every Sunday ... you can attend Sunday School classes your whole life long ... you can tithe to the church ... you can bring canned food for the poor ... you can be a part of the Presbyterian Women ... you can put a copy of the Bible out on your coffee table ... you can even stay awake listening to me every Sunday ... but unless God's really gotten that hook set in you and you won't let it go ... unless you're fully committed to giving your life to Christ ... then those other lures and those other nets in the sea are going to get you. And, unfortunately, they will.

None of us are immune from them ... they will hook you ... you will get tangled in the nets of sin ... but if that hook Christ has set in your heart is still there ... if you haven't let go of it ... then through the power and grace and love of Christ ... you can break the lines of sin ... you can get untangled from the nets of worldly temptations.

Yeah ... you'll get a little hurt sometimes ... maybe even a little bloody or dirty ... but Christ is there to bring you back to him ... to help you turn your life around ... to keep you attached to the one power in your life that you will ever need ... and when he does ... you will know that God's hook is set deep in your heart.

You see ... God calls us ... sometimes over and over and over ... sometimes we get hooked on that first cast and we never let go ... and sometimes we spit out God's hook time and time again ... but I'll tell you this ... Jesus Christ will never give up on you ... no matter where you go ... no matter how old you may become ... Christ will keep right on casting into your life ... seeking you over and over and over ... and when you finally do take that bait ... and let it grab you and hold you ... there will be nothing but joy and elation in heaven ... and your life will never be the same again.

And you will taste ... in all its fullness and richness ... the finest bread that Christ will ever provide.

Let us pray:

Here I am, Lord, is it I, Lord?

I have heard You calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold Your people in my heart.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.