

# *Fishers and Shepherds*

From Bishop Michael Rinehart

Synod Assembly

April 18, 2010

I bring you greetings from our bishop, Michael Rinehart, who is with our pastors and various lay leaders at synod assembly this weekend. We will be remembering them in prayer today. Our sermon this morning is his message to you which I will now read to you.

[Pause.]

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

[Pause.]

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Grant us faith to go out with great courage, knowing not where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I remember you and your pastor(s) with joy in my prayers every week.

- Thank you for your witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Thank you for your ministry in your community.
- Thank you for the ministry we do together.

A synod is a group of congregations walking together, doing together what we cannot do alone:

- Together we train pastors and lay leaders for ministry.
- Together we send missionaries.
- Together we support a complex network of global churches.
- Together we respond to disasters and provide Lutheran Social Services.
- Together we congregations find pastors through the call process.
- Together we help congregations in crisis or conflict.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the work God has called us to do is too great for any one person, or any one congregation. We are better together than alone. The Holy Spirit calls and gathers the church. We are meant to be a team that witnesses to the crucified and resurrected Jesus, in word, and in deed.

[Pause.]

In today's gospel reading, Peter and the disciples have been out in the boat all night long and have caught absolutely nothing. A man yells from the shore: "Cast your net to the right side of the boat..." And when they do, there are so many fish they can't haul the net in. (John 20)

Instantly, Peter is transported back to an earlier time, three years ago when Jesus first stepped into his boat, and into his life. Even then, they caught so many fish the nets were breaking. And Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching people."

Who really got caught in that story? Was it not Peter himself that got caught... by Jesus?

What does it mean to be caught by Jesus? One of my mentors, Walt Bouman, taught us: "To say 'Jesus is Lord,' is to say, 'I believe in Jesus' way of being in the world, as my way of being in the world.'" That's what it means to be caught in Jesus' net: to believe in Jesus' way of being in the world as our way of being in the world.

**Jesus' way of being in the world is the way of the cross.** It is the way of humility, emptying oneself, of taking the lower place.

*Have this mind among you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.*

*Philippians 2*

Jesus' way of being in the world is eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' way of being in the world is washing the disciples' feet. Jesus' way of being in the world is loving ones enemies. His way of being in the world is love:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two rest all the Law and the Prophets.*  
*Matthew 22*

**So then how do we “catch” people?**

- How do we invite people to be “in Christ?”
- How do we invite them into Christ’s way of being in the world?
- How do you fish for people?

You can’t force them in the boat. My father used to call that “hook-jabbing.” Too often in the church we think we can grab the fish by the neck and jam the hook down its throat.

You can’t force people into the boat. You can’t guilt them in. Don’t “should” on people. S – H – O – U – L – D. Don’t “should” on people: “You should go to church.” That’s like saying, “You should eat cod liver oil.” If it tastes bad, it’s not going to happen. Jesus never “shoulded” people into following him. He invited them. He invited them to be a part of a community with a mission.

*By this shall all people know you are my disciples, if you love one another.*  
*John 13*

How we “catch” people is inviting them into a community of love – a community of healing and great hospitality.

I had an atheist friend who became a Christian. I asked him what had changed his mind. He said, “Nothing.” He continued, “I was befriended by a group of Christians who loved me and accepted me unconditionally. I saw that they had something that I wanted.”

People desperately need community. They want to belong to something real, something alive, something hope-filled, something that brings healing and joy into their lives. People crave spiritual community. We have the most attractive message in the world: The Word of life. The Word of hope. Peter says to Jesus:

*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*  
*John 6*

**But here's the problem.** When our churches become caught up in intra-church squabbles, they cease to be places of hope and healing. They cease to be places of love and joy.

Fighting about doctrine will not bring people into your church. The unchurched look at our church fights, shake their heads, and lose interest in the church completely. They see us arguing about who is, and who is not welcome, and they're not stupid: They know this doesn't look like Jesus' way of being in the world. And so they want nothing to do with us. They say, "I get enough infighting at work. I don't need more of it on the weekends."

Young adults, in particular, long to be part of a community of spiritual practice. They expect the church to be about prayer. They expect us to be about loving our neighbor. They expect us to be about spiritual values like generosity, compassion, and justice. When they see the church serving the poor, loving the stranger, healing the sick, visiting those in prison, doing what Jesus did, then they become very interested.

So evangelism hinges on us becoming communities of spiritual practice. Jesus says to Peter, "Feed my sheep."

Not only are we to be **fishers**, but we are also called to be **shepherds**, who lead the sheep to green pastures and still waters.

Once the unchurched take the risk, out of a hope and hunger deep within them, because they have heard snatches of the message that changes lives, then it is our job to feed them. Most of the churches I've visited in this synod are GREAT at feeding, physically. Thanks to you, I've put on weight!

We need to become just as good at feeding people spiritually, so that they grow spiritually.

**What does it mean to grow spiritually?** In Galatians 5:22, Paul talks about the fruits of the Spirit. He mentions nine. Can you say them with me? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. When a person grows spiritually, those will be the fruits.

Are you more loving than you were this time last year? Are you more joyful? More peaceful? Are you become more patient? Kind? You get the idea? Are you growing spiritually? As you grow closer to God, your life will bear this fruit.

Is your church a spiritual incubator? People of God, let's create an intentional environment where people will grow spiritually. Let's be a place where people learn how to pray, in everyday life. Let's be a place where people learn how to listen for God in Scripture? Let's encourage people to grow in giving and serving so that their lives look more and more like Jesus – so that their way of being in the world looks more and more like Jesus' way of being in the world.

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “**Feed my lambs.**”

“Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

“**Tend my sheep.**”

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “**Feed my sheep.**”

Amen.