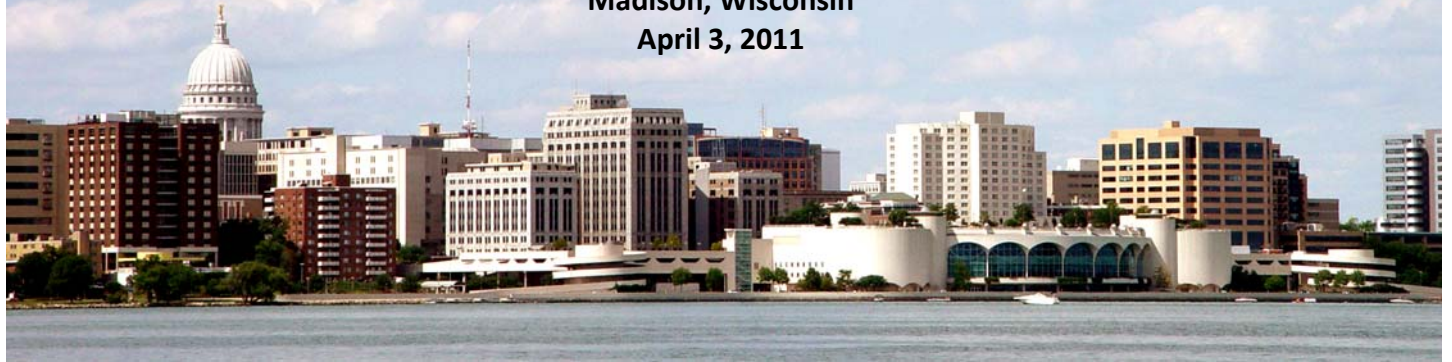


# ***“Fishing Without a Hook?”***

**MATTHEW 9:35-38**

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I have read that Mark Twain loved to relax by going fishing, and yet he hated to catch any fish. After all, actually catching a fish is hard work. There is all of the intense, laborious effort in getting the fish off the hook, then there is the cleaning of the fish, and then there is the preparation of the meal, and so he discovered that fishing is really not very relaxing if you actually catch something. However, when Mark Twain tried to relax by simply doing nothing, people thought he was lazy, but he found that if he went fishing, he could relax all that he wanted. People would see him by the river, and they would say, “Oh, look, he’s fishing, we’d better not bother him.” So, Mark Twain had the perfect solution: He would take a fishing pole, a line, and a bobber, but he would not put a hook on the end of the line. So, he would cast the bobber into the water, and then he would just sit there on the shore. That way, he could relax all he wanted and (as he put it) he would then be bothered by neither man nor fish! He would look busy without ever actually doing anything—fishing without a hook!

This morning I would invite you to think with me about the danger of having that same attitude when it comes to spiritual matters, the danger of appearing to be involved in the Lord’s work without actually doing anything, the danger of appearing to be fishing while actually just sitting on the shore doing nothing more than holding a pole. And as we study this particular danger, I would invite you to turn with me to our text for this morning’s lesson, which is Matthew 9:35-38 (p. 1515). The Lord has had a challenging and very busy day, but as we get to the end of Matthew 9, we discover the secret to the Lord’s work. We discover what it was that made the Lord so effective at reaching out with the gospel message, and we discover some key thoughts that will hopefully keep us motivated even today. If you will, please look with me at Matthew 9:35-38,

***<sup>35</sup> Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. <sup>36</sup> Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”***

As we look at these four verses, I would encourage all of us to keep our Bibles open to this passage as we allow ourselves to be changed and challenged by the word of God. And I would say here at the beginning that

(as always) I am preaching to myself first. We are here this morning to learn about Jesus. He is the reason why we are here. This morning, then, let us look at the Lord so that we can be encouraged to keep on keeping on. With this in mind, I would suggest four very basic ways that we can apply these verses to our lives today, four very basic ideas that will encourage us to actually use a hook in our fishing, four very basic ideas that will encourage us to do more reaching out to the world as we should.

**I. And the first concept I'd like for us to consider from this passage is that JESUS WENT TO THE PEOPLE.**

And this may seem rather obvious, but the point is that Jesus saw the crowds, He saw their needs, and He made a connection. People matter to Jesus! He opened His eyes to what was going on around Him in the world. He did not turn a blind eye to those who were hurting, but He made Himself aware of their needs simply by paying attention. The Lord did not hide in a bunker somewhere, He did not shut Himself off in a monastery, and He certainly did not spend all of His time in a church building waiting for people to come find Him, but He went out there and met people. He worshiped with them in their synagogues, He attended their weddings, He got on their fishing boats, He laughed, He cried, He got involved. He knew who they were because He got involved in their daily lives. As we see in this passage, the Lord cared for those who were sick. He spent time with them. He did not see these crowds as an obstacle, He did not see them as an interruption, but He saw them as an opportunity. He saw their deepest needs. He saw their great potential. He saw each one of them as a precious soul.

You know, when I walk by the cell phone kiosk at Sam's Club, I get the distinct feeling that the guy is staring at my phone. He is looking to see whether I have the latest model, he sees me as a customer. When I walk by Great Clips, those ladies are looking at my hair, and they know I need to walk in. They see me as someone needing a haircut. When I drive in over at Zimbrick, those guys are looking at my dented up 9-year old Honda Odyssey with 164,000 miles on it, and I can see them wiping the drool off of their faces—they think they know why I'm there. But when Jesus saw people He saw souls. He had a way of looking through the outer shell, and He looked at people as valuable in the eyes of God. Jesus, therefore, is not a god who just sits on a throne looking down His nose at people, but He is a God who gets involved, a God who makes the first move, a God who comes to us.

And so the question for us is: Are we doing this for others? Do we look at the people around us just as Jesus looked at the people around Him? Are we putting ourselves out there? Are we getting involved in other people's lives? Are we allowing ourselves to be touched by our friends and neighbors? Do we see our neighbors simply as neighbors, or do we see them as souls? Do we see our co-workers merely as co-workers, or do we see them as souls? Do we see our relatives merely as relatives, or do we see them as souls? Do we talk to our friends and people we meet about just about everything except the one and only thing that really matters? Or do we have the courage and the wisdom to think about them as eternal souls and to allow the conversation to progress beyond the weather?

You know, in our society today, it is very easy to be a spectator. It is easy to go online and just kind of observe what other people are doing without really making ourselves available. It is easy to "go" without really going. Jesus, however, did not just sit around waiting for people to come to Him, but He put Himself out there, He put Himself in a position where He could make a real difference. As He said about his own mission (in Luke 19:10), "**...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**" Jesus, therefore, went to the people, and so the question is: Are we going to the people just as Jesus did? Do we see ourselves as being on a mission? Or, are we fishing without a hook?

**II. There is a second basic idea I would like for us to notice in this passage, and that is: Jesus did not just go, but HE WENT TO DELIVER A VERY SPECIFIC MESSAGE.**

Let's look again at verse 35. Yes, Jesus went to the people, but as He went, He was *"...teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom."* In other words, He didn't just go, but He went with a message, *"...teaching...and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom."* We know from history that synagogues were dedicated to teaching. So, in a typical synagogue service, someone would lead a prayer, someone would stand up and read from the Law of Moses, and then someone would sit down and explain the passage. Well, we find in this passage that this is what Jesus did. He went to the synagogues, and He used those visits as opportunities to explain the good news about God's kingdom. He taught it and He proclaimed it. The word *"proclaimed"* refers to making a public announcement. And so the Lord wouldn't just go out there to meet people, but as He met people He would explain the word of God.

He wasn't out there just to heal, just to raise people from the dead. He wasn't out there to start some kind of new program. He wasn't out there to trick people into joining some kind of a church. But He was out there to announce the good news concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus was there to preach the truth.

And as we think about what He did, we realize that the world today needs the same thing. The good news is that Jesus died for our sins and that we no longer need to be burdened down with some of those terrible things that we have done in the past. The good news is that God has a plan to make things right. The good news is that forgiveness is available. The good news is that we are no longer slaves to sin, but we now have the power to get out of those sins.

And as Christians, we have been commanded to pass it on. We have been told by the Lord to *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"* (Mark 16:15). And so the question is: How are we doing with that? Not just us as a congregation, but each of us individually. Are we delivering a message? Are we telling people about the Lord and His kingdom? Are we explaining what the church really is? Are we really proclaiming the gospel as He did, or are we fishing without a hook?

**III. There is something else I would like for us to notice in this passage, and that is: We find here that THE LORD WAS MOVED BY COMPASSION.**

In other words, he wasn't just connecting with people and announcing the good news for no good reason, but he was motivated by His deep love for the people He saw. He was moved by compassion. In other words, He felt what they were feeling. He put Himself in their place. He suffered together with them. When they hurt, He hurt. He could feel it. This is why (in Luke 19:41) Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. Everywhere He went, Jesus could see people who were broken down in sin, lost in spiritual darkness,

In verse 36, we find that Jesus felt compassion for these people, *"...because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."* I looked up those words this week, and I was actually a little shocked. Literally, as I understand it, the word *"distressed"* refers to being "skinned." It is a graphic word that refers to being mangled, flayed, or having the flesh stripped away. The people, then, were like sheep that had been ripped apart and skinned alive. They had been harassed and victimized by the world. Don't we know people like this? Don't we know people who have been mangled by the world?

But then secondly, the people were *"dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."* The word *"dispirited"* literally refers to being thrown down or tossed aside. The word was used to refer to soldiers who were beaten and

bloodied and left to die on the battlefield, wounded and left for dead. The word was used to refer to an animal that had been attacked by a predator and had been thrashed around and thrown down on the ground. And again, don't we know people like this? Don't we know people who have been thrown down by the world?

Jesus, therefore, looked around Him and saw people who were like this in a spiritual sense, skinned, thrown down and left for dead. Their spiritual suffering was so great that this is the only way it could be described. And so for this reason, Jesus ***"felt compassion."*** He was moved to do something. He was moved to connect. He was moved to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God. That is what these people needed! And so when the Lord saw a man with leprosy, the Lord could feel that man's pain, He could feel the rejection, He could feel the loneliness, He could feel the isolation, and so the Lord was moved to do something about it. When the Lord saw the woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery, He not only saw her, but He could feel what she was going through. He could feel the eyes of the crowd. He could feel the embarrassment. His heart was breaking right along with hers, and so he reacted with compassion. He did not tell her to just go on living the way she was living, but He gave her hope for the future, ***"Go. From now on sin no more"*** (John 8:11). He responded with love and compassionate forgiveness, wiping her slate clean and expressing His confidence in her that she could do so much better.

In these crowds of thousands of people, there had to be many, many people in so many similar situations: proud people, broken people, addicts, spouse abusers, adulterers, homosexuals, cheaters, liars, gossips, hypocrites, prostitutes, thieves. And the Lord sees all of it and He is moved with compassion. Compassion says, "What you are doing is wrong. Now let me help you with that."

What about us? What happens when we see someone caught up in sin? Do we feel compassion? Do we feel with that person? Do our hearts break? Are we touched by what they're going through? Do we see the people around us at work or at school as sheep without a shepherd? Maybe there's someone we work with who's just plain obnoxious, and maybe we just try to stay away (and there is a place for that sometimes), but is it possible that that person is simply ***"distressed and dispirited like [a] sheep without a shepherd"***? Is it possible that that person has been skinned and thrown down? Is it possible that that person is simply hurting and lonely? Is it possible that that person is simply broken down in some kind of private sin and has no idea that there is good news available? Is it possible that maybe we are in a special position to do for them what someone has done for us? Is it possible that we are in a unique position to pass along the good news of God's kingdom?

Is it possible that we are in a unique position simply to feel with another person and maybe just to sit with them in their time of pain or loss? I am reminded of a farmer who was out plowing his fields one spring, and in the middle of it, he came to a low spot and got stuck in the mud. The harder he tried to get out, the worse it got. Finally, he walked over to a neighbor and asked for help. The neighbor came over and agreed it was pretty bad. The neighbor shook his head and said, "It doesn't look good, but I tell you what: I'll give it a try pulling you out, but if we don't get it out, I'll at least come sit there in the mud with you!" Sometimes compassion means that we will simply sit there in the mud with a friend.

Stress, big decisions with no good answer, family troubles, problems, illness or injury: The people around us today are really no different than the people around the Lord, people who are ***"distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."*** The Lord did not just pass by, the Lord did not just preach a sermon, but He got involved. He felt compassion.

I don't know about where you live, but where we live our house is on the side of a hill, and we can look down and we can see houses to every horizon. In fact, I imagine it would be safe to say that we can see thousands of homes from our front porch. How would Jesus look at all of those homes? I believe he would look at them as souls who will spend eternity in one of two very different places. He would look at them as people who are ***"distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."*** And I believe that He would feel compassion. And so the question for us is: How do we see those people? Are we also moved with compassion, or are we so caught up in our own worries that we don't have time to deal with any of that? Do we really care, or are we so busy living that we have forgotten about the dying? Do we truly feel for people, or are we fishing without a hook?

**IV. There is one final idea I would like for us consider from this passage in Matthew 9, and that is: JESUS CHALLENGED HIS FOLLOWERS.**

I don't know if we realize this, but at this point in the book of Matthew, Jesus is basically the only one doing any work! He is in the process of training the disciples, but at this point they haven't really done anything yet! And so we find in this passage that Jesus challenged them to do what He was doing, He challenged them to go as He went, He challenged them to preach as He preached, He challenged them to be moved with compassion as He was moved, and He did this by challenging them to pray just as He prayed. He did this because the harvest was ready. Notice Jesus didn't say, "Oh, this harvest is too great; there's nothing I can do about it." He did not say, "Oh, there is too much to do!" But instead, the harvest was out there in the field, it was ready to come in, but there were not enough workers to go out there and bring it in. And so the Lord tells His disciples to pray, to ask God to send out workers into the harvest.

Also notice here: Jesus did not start by telling his disciples to go. He did not get on them for being lazy. He did not berate them for sitting there doing nothing. But rather, He told them to pray. And it has always been interesting to me that prayer has a way of changing our priorities. Have you noticed that? If I were to spend several hours asking God for help in bringing in the harvest, I think after a while I would start to think, "Hey, maybe there is something that I can do about this!" When we go to God in prayer, we are preparing our hearts, we are opening our minds to doing what God wants us to do. And that is exactly what happens here. In fact, if we were to read on into the next chapter, we would find that Jesus sends the disciples out to preach on their own, and the disciples very eagerly accept the mission. After all, they had apparently been praying about it! They prayed, and then those who prayed went out as an answer to those prayers.

In the same way, prayer is so important today. And how can we pray for more workers without first saying (as the prophet Isaiah said), ***"Here am I. Send me!"*** (Isaiah 6:8)? When we pray for God to send someone, we cannot help but being open to the possibility that we are the ones who might be sent. As someone has said, "Everyone's work soon becomes no one's work." In other words, the prayer for workers needs to be personal. Bringing in a harvest is hard work, but it can be done with God's help. We need to pray, then, for God to open doors. We can pray for opportunities. We can pray for courage in reaching out with the good news. And then once we pray, we can get out there and do it.

Have we ever stopped to think about the alternative? God said the harvest is ready. What happens if we don't go bring it in? What happens is that the crop rots in the field. The crop goes to waste. I hate it when that happens in our garden. One time we went to Bible camp for two weeks right when the okra was ready to harvest. We got back from camp, and we had a 20-foot row of okra that were all about 12 inches long, like huge bananas. They were all tough and woody, and the entire crop was wasted. We might not lose any sleep

over a few dozen okra, but the harvest we are talking about this morning involves people. God is telling us that people are ready to obey the gospel, but the holdup is a shortage of workers.

This next Sunday, the men of this congregation will be making a decision concerning whether we will have a Vacation Bible School this summer. We have a date, we have an outline of everything that needs to be done, we have a source for class material, but right now we are facing a shortage of workers, a shortage of those who are willing to teach, a shortage of those who are willing to bring in the harvest. I would suggest that all of us go home and pray about it this week. Let's pray about it every day, and let's see whether we have enough workers to go out into that particular harvest field.

As we pray about it, I'm hoping that we see it as a matter of priority. I am thinking the man who called the police one night and said that there were a couple of guys stealing some equipment out of his barn. Well, the police dispatcher said, "I'm sorry, but we don't have anybody available right now." So, the guy hangs up. He calls back two minutes later, and he says, "You guys don't need to come out here anymore. I shot both of the burglars, and it's all over." Well, three minutes later, the farm was surrounded by the SWAT team, several patrol cars, and an ambulance, and they catch the burglars in the act. The officer in charge went up to the farmer and said, "I thought you said you shot the burglars!" And the farmer said, "I thought you said no one was available!" You see, it was a matter of priorities.

In the same way, sometimes we just need to open our eyes to look at people the way Jesus looked at people. Maybe there's that kid in your English class who really seems to be having trouble at home, and maybe we can be a friend. Maybe we have a neighbor struggling with cancer, and maybe we can stop by and let her know that she is in our prayers. Maybe you have a friend on Facebook who is going through a tough time, and maybe we can post on their wall, "I am praying for you today. Hang in there." Or maybe someone at work is going off about her no-good lazy husband. Perhaps that is an opportunity to say, "Well, I will pray about that guy!"

Jesus, then, challenged His disciples. He not only challenged them to pray, but in the very next chapter He challenged them to go out and actually participate in the harvest. Will we accept that challenge, or will we go fishing with no hook?

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would invite all of us to allow the word of God to change the way we think, to change the way we live, to change our priorities. The harvest is ready. It is a lot of work, but it is doable. Will we sit back and wait for someone to beg us to get involved, or will we go to God in prayer, asking for more workers? Will we go back to work or school tomorrow morning the same way we went back to school or work last week, or will we look around with a fresh set of eyes? Will we make a new effort to look at people the way Jesus looks at people? Will we allow ourselves to be moved with compassion just as the Lord was moved? Will we commit not just to being nice to people, but will we commit to telling someone about the good news this week? Will we make a new commitment to paying attention to the people we run into during the week? The exciting thing about this is that we don't need to move. We don't need to travel to some far off, distant land, but we can bring in the harvest right where we are. Wouldn't it be safe to say that there are a lot of "***distressed and dispirited***" people all around us right here in the Madison area? People all around us need to hear the good news of God's kingdom.

Maybe you have your own struggles this morning. Maybe you are worried about your job, or your health, or your finances, or your family, or maybe some kind of spiritual struggle. But whatever you are going through, our passage tells us that Jesus understands. Jesus knows exactly what we are going through. If there is something you would like for us to pray about as a congregation, we would encourage you to write it down and bring it to the front in just a moment, and we would be glad to take it to God in prayer as a congregation.

Or maybe you are not even a Christian. The Bible teaches that we respond to God's sacrifice by turning away from sin, by confessing our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and then by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water for the forgiveness of whatever we have done in the past. At that point, we are born into God's family, and we do the best we can to live like Jesus. If you have any questions, let us know, but if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)