

The Most Basic Task for a Church: Making Disciples

I don't know if you realize it, but apart from South Korea, perhaps, the U.S. is the most church-ed country in the world. About 40% of Americans, according to surveys, are found in church on Sunday morning. I know that is probably inflated. 40% has always seemed high to me. I imagine that there are lots of people that while they may not be lying to the survey taker, they might be shading the truth, because it is still socially acceptable to say that you go to church. But even if that percentage of 40% is inflated, the U.S. vastly outstrips other nations in the world, particularly in the Western world in terms of church participation.

Now, with such a flood of people going to church, even if we lowered it to 30-35%, a third of America in church on Sunday morning, does it seem to you that all of these church goers are impacting in a radical way the morality, the ethical environment, the behavioral environment of the U.S.? For example, not only does the U.S. lead the world in church attendance, but it also leads the world in the production of pornography. The U.S., by far, is the largest purveyor of pornography worldwide and we spill our garbage over the rest of the planet. The U.S. is also the leader in the world in divorce. Right now, newly married people have a 50/50 chance of staying married. 50% of all new marriages in the 90's are ending in divorce. If you do a statistical cross sample decade by decade, so that you compare

the rate of divorce among those who got married in the 1940's with those who got married in the 1950's, with those who got married in the 1960's and 70's and 80's and 90's, what you will discover is that decade by decade the divorce rate has consistently increased.

So we have this huge church going population and yet we also have the highest rate of pornography usage and divorce. We have the highest abortion rates in the world and the highest unwed pregnancy rates in the Western world. Now it would be nice to say that all of those unwed pregnancies and divorces are happening among the 60% of people who don't go to church. We in the church are free from those social problems. And yet as I look at our own church, the Columbus Vineyard, we also have had a number of pregnancies outside of wedlock. What that means is that we have had a number of people who are having sex outside of marriage. You may not be that smart, but you can at least figure that out. When a couple says that they are having a baby and they are not married, they are having sex. And what that further means is that there is a number of people in this church who are simply disregarding a multitude of biblical commandments against having sex outside of marriage. What is going on?

Do you know that the abortion rate among Roman Catholics is actually higher than the national average? With all the church pronouncements regarding abortions and if you ask the average American, "What group of people in the country are most against abortions," they would probably say, "The Roman Catholic Church." With all the pronouncements and writings and conferences and papers, Roman Catholics have abortions at a rate higher than the national average. This led one

church historian, a man my the name of Martin Marty, who taught for years at the University of Chicago – it led Martin Marty, this church historian and professor, to comment, “Perhaps the best thing that Roman Catholics could do to lower the abortion rate is to stop having so many abortions.”

Now, I don’t have any particular statistic on this other than my own observation and that is that I would venture a guess that the TV watching habits of those within the church are not terribly different than those outside the church. And I would venture a guess that the average church-goer agrees with the larger society that life goes better with more stuff – more knick knacks, more CDs, more clothes, more entertainment equipment. I would venture a guess that in all of America there isn’t much of a difference between the lifestyle and spending habits of those in the church and those outside the church. So that what I am saying is that in many way, at least along moral and cultural and lifestyle criteria, there is not a radical distinction between those who are going to church and those who aren’t.

Now, there is some and it certainly depends on the sort of church people are going to, but what is the basic problem? What is the basic problem?

Friend, the basic problem is that while people are by the millions sitting in churches, occupying the pews and the chairs, listening to the special music or singing along, involved, perhaps in some social function of the church, participating in some board or committee meeting, the church has failed in the one essential task that Jesus left the church to do and that is the task of making disciples. While churches in the U.S. are good at doing a lot of things, their churches have not been good at the task of producing disciples in this generation – people who are followers

of Jesus in thought, word and deed. Millions of people register decisions yearly for Christ. They go forward in Billy Graham Crusades, as well as other crusades, as well as in our own church. But as we examine those people five years later, in terms of their basic values, their basic beliefs about life and how life ought to be lived, their basic practices, we often find little difference between church goers and the rest of the world.

Again, what is the problem? In its simplest terms, the problem is that churches in America have failed. Not every church and not all to the same degree – I am not indicting us or anyone else, but as a general picture of the American church, churches have failed in our fundamental calling, which is to produce disciples. I am calling today's talk, "The Most Basic Task of a Church: Making Disciples." Let's pray.

If you have a Bible I would like you to open up to Mark 1, beginning in v. 16, "As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther he saw James, son of Zebedee, and his brother, John, in a boat preparing their nets. Without delay he called them and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men and followed him."

I started a series last week that I called "Kingdom Basics." And I told you last week that as a church community we are getting ready to undertake an enormous building project and that is to build a new auditorium at the back of this building. As the church has grown, our full church population in fall and winter and spring, we have just about maxed out three main services. We have a fourth on Sunday

morning. It appears that, given our current growth curve, we will have to go to five services sometime next spring. That will stretch our resources to a large degree regarding everything from children's ministry to worship, to building usage, to poor old me.

And so we historically have always said that the church that doesn't want to grow is outside of the will of God and that the church that doesn't do what it takes to grow is outside the will of God. We, historically, as a church community have been willing to do what we need to do to accommodate new people and enfold them into the body. We have multiplied services and have gone to Saturday night and three Sunday services. We have built a wing and all of that to basically announce that if someone lives within driving distance of the Columbus Vineyard, they are a part of our target and we will do what we need to do to reach those folks for the sake of Christ. And so the next step in this growth journey is to add on space.

But as I said last week before we start talking buildings, it is important for me as your pastor to make sure that our spiritual foundations, as a church community, are sound. The Columbus Vineyard exists for spiritual ministry. We exist to build up men and women and children and not to build buildings. Building buildings is simply a way for us to build men, women and children. And there is a foundational principle in the message of the kingdom of God that I want to communicate to you over the course of the summer. The message of the kingdom is fundamental to an understanding of the Bible and an understanding of who we are as a church.

Now those of you who have come in the last year or two have never heard me teach on the kingdom of God. So you never really have caught a large part of the

foundation of this church. And in Mark 1:16-20 we read the basic task of the kingdom and that is to make disciples, to make kingdom followers. So it says, "As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen."

Now, the Sea of Galilee is a beautiful lake. It is an inland (actually it is a lake and not a sea) lake. It is a beautiful lake, almost 700 feet below sea level, on the northeast edge of Israel. It is about 14 miles long and 6 miles wide. And if you are familiar with the New Testament you will have seen that much of Jesus' ministry took place near this lake. In New Testament times there were numerous towns along the shore and the lake had an abundance of fish. So there was a flourishing fishing industry on the north and west side of the lake. And that is where you see Jesus in a lot of the New Testament, walking along teaching in the towns around the Sea of Galilee.

Well, it says that he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, casting a net into the lake. This is not the first time that Jesus ever saw these men and it is not these men's first acquaintance with Christ. They became acquainted with Jesus a year earlier and we read this story of their acquaintance with Jesus in John 1. They had the opportunity to listen to him and to hear him teach. And now Jesus calls them into closer companionship with himself saying, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Here is the call by Jesus to these four men to become his disciples.

Now, Jesus did not invent the concept of discipleship. Greek philosophers, hundreds of years before Jesus, had disciples. There were disciples of Plato and

Socrates, Aristotle and Zeno and Epicurus and all the rest. To the Greeks, being a disciple was essentially to be a learner, a pupil, and a student of a great teacher. So a disciple of Plato would listen to Plato teach and drink in his philosophy and become an expert and communicator of the philosophy of Plato. To be a disciple to the Greeks meant that you were a student, a pupil.

A discipleship was not unknown among the Jews either. Jesus wasn't reaching in the Greek world, to the Gentile world, when he called men and women to become his disciples. In the New Testament we read that some of the prophets had disciples. For instance, Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah speaks of having disciples. And we read of disciples of the prophet Samuel and the disciples of Elisha. It is apparent that there were schools of prophecy where prophets taught younger disciples how to prophesy and worship leaders taught younger worship leaders how to lead worship. We read all about that in 1 Chronicles 25.

In the New Testament we read of disciples of the Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist. And what you see in the Jewish context of discipleship is something different than among the Greeks. And for the Jews discipleship wasn't simply a matter of being a student or pupil or learner of the philosophy of your teacher. For the Jews, being a disciple meant submitting yourself entirely to follow the way of life of your teacher. So you would not only sit around for lectures, but you would follow your teacher, observe their pattern of life and then imitate that.

There is a story that my friend, Don Williams, likes to tell about a disciple of a famous Jewish Rabbi who was so committed to imitate and follow his master, that he followed him into the privy, to the bathroom. The disciple later commented that

he had learned three valuable lessons from his Rabbi in the bathroom. I have no idea what they were and I am not sure I would repeat them anyway in this setting.

But disciples were people among the Jews who committed themselves to follow the whole pattern of life of their Master.

What made Jesus' call of the disciples different from what the other Rabbis would do with their disciples? Well, for one thing, in contrast to the rabbinical circle where disciples chose their own masters, the rabbi was voluntarily chosen by the disciple, Jesus turns the whole process on its head. And unlike any Jewish Rabbi, Jesus takes the initiative and personally calls Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him. You will note in the story that the disciples did not run up and say, "Jesus, may we follow you? May we volunteer for your service?" Church is a voluntary association of those who, on their own initiative, decide to join the club and pay the membership dues. Jesus is not interested in voluntary associations. Becoming a disciple begins by Jesus' initiative and Jesus' calling.

You say, "What difference does it make if I chose Jesus or he chose me? What difference does it make if I volunteered for service or I was drafted?"

Well for me, it makes an enormous amount of difference in terms of my security. See, if I began this whole thing called discipleship, I might have to keep it going by my own commitment level, my own energy, and my own heroic efforts. That is what a lot of man-centered Christianity in America is founded on. It is what can we do by our own initiative, our own efforts, our own strategizing to build the Kingdom of God in our generation? To me that is not only a very exhausting place to be, to have

to keep everything going by my own energy, since I began it, I have to keep it going. It is not only an exhausting prospect, but it is also a very insecure prospect.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Phil. 1:6, which says: “He who began a good work in you...” He began it. He called you. This is his initiative. If you are a Christian, it is because you were divinely appointed and called by God. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

See, I don’t know how you imagine the Christian life, but when I talk to many people, their insecurity, their fearfulness, communicates to me a picture of their Christianity in which they believe that they are hanging onto God the way a mountain climber whose rope has broke is hanging onto the edge of a cliff. By their fingernails, struggling to get some footing.

The good news of Christianity is that you don’t have to hang onto God by your fingernails or else lose him forever. The good news of the gospel is that if you are in Christ you have been called by God into that position and you are being held right now by his grip. Or as the end of the book of Jude puts it, “To him who has been able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our Savior. Be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more.” In his grip by his call.

Called by Jesus. What a secure thought. I didn’t begin this thing. And it not only increases my sense of security, but being called by Jesus increases my sense of confidence being bold with him.

I have told you this story before, but with all the new people, and even with some of the old people, it bears repeating. We were in the old building. I was trying to get to church one Sunday morning and they were running the Columbus Triathlon. And so they blocked all the streets running north and south. I was living in Worthington at the time and trying to get to our church building south of Morse Rd. They blocked all the streets – the cross street at 161; they blocked me coming across at Indianola at Morse Rd. They blocked me at Cook Rd. They blocked me at Broadway. All the way down Indianola, it was completely blocked off and completely sealed off. I could not get across. Finally, in frustration after driving and driving and trying to get across these barriers erected by the police so that runners could run – since no one on Sunday morning would be doing anything else besides running or perhaps puttering around the yard. There were these barriers across the roads and I was about the 5th car in line. I was watching this very angry policeman who appeared as if he were about to have a stroke because he was red-faced and screaming at people: Turn around; as they were approaching the barrier. I was watching cars make a U-turn after talking with him. The third car in front of me; the second car in front of me; and the first car in front of me – they were all turning around. And I said, “God, you are the one who called me to preach. And if you don’t want me to this Sunday morning, that is fine. I will just go home. But I didn’t ask for this. You called me and so if you want me to get across this road, you have to get me through.”

I drove up to the policeman and he was about to scream at me. I rolled down my window and said, “Wait. I am a pastor and my church is right across this road and

right now there are about 300 people waiting to hear me preach. And I can't get there. And we have two other services."

He said, "Just a second." He removed the barrier and he screamed down to another policeman down the street, "Let him through. Let him through." And literally for a half a mile there were policemen screaming along the way, "Let him through. Let him through." Now, this is the confidence we have when we are called by God. Let him through. Clear the obstacles. Remove the barriers. I am going before you and I stand behind you.

Let me ask you a personal question. Do you know that kind of confidence in your life that when you are facing some barrier or hurdle that you can stand before God boldly and confidently and say, "Lord, you called me to this. To my job as father. To my job as mother. To this particular ministry as a small group leader or mission. To this career, to go to school at night. You called me to this. It is because of you that I am in this situation. I didn't ask for it and I didn't volunteer for it. You drafted me. And now, God, unless you swing this door open or remove this obstacle, unless you break down the opposition, I can't move forward. Lord, remove the opposition."

Discipleship is grounded in a profound level of confidence in your calling. And not only calling by Jesus, but to Jesus. The call of Jesus was unlike that of the Greek philosopher who was calling his disciples to follow his teaching. Jesus' call was a much more personal call. He called his disciples to follow him. In Mark 1:17 he doesn't say "Come and follow my teaching." He has implicit in the "follow me," follow my teaching. But it is more than that. His call to his disciples was a personal call into relationship to follow him, not just his teaching, but to be with him. To

commit yourself wholeheartedly to him. The calling of the disciples is unto Jesus. Not just to a body of information, but to Jesus. And whatever else the disciples didn't understand and how limited their perceptions were, they got this lesson – that they were called to Jesus and that he was the centerpiece of their followership.

Let me prove this to you. What was the state of mind of the disciples after the death of Christ and before his resurrection? How did the disciples respond to the death of Christ? They gave up. They went back to fishing and their former ways of life because their discipleship in their own minds was now over. Nowhere before his resurrection, do we read that Jesus' teaching was a source of strength and encouragement to his disciples and they kept on encouraging each other with his teaching. His disciples were restored to discipleship by his personal appearance. It wasn't his teaching that brought about their continued discipleship. It was him. He came and renewed relationship with him through his resurrection appearances. Discipleship is all about faithfulness and relationship to Christ.

Now certainly that includes following his teaching. But it is far more holistic, far more demanding. It is my person committed to follow his person.

Do you know in this way Christianity is so different than the world's other religions. When Buddha was dying, his disciples asked how they could best remember him. The Buddha responded, "Don't even bother. It is my teaching, not my person, that counts." With Jesus it is all together different. Everything centers on his person. Discipleship means knowing Jesus, loving Jesus, believing Jesus, and being committed to Jesus, following Jesus.

I want you to see this idea that discipleship means being called by Jesus, but also being called to Jesus. Flip over to Mark 3:14 where Mark writes, “He appointed twelve; designating them apostles, that they might be with him.” See, the first step of discipleship is connecting with Jesus, being with him, being called to him.

I am concerned that much of the church in America would run the way it has always been running if Jesus weren’t around and didn’t exist or wasn’t resurrected from the dead. Church people would just keep on keeping on. But disciples couldn’t keep on keeping on because disciples know that the secret of discipleship is doing everything you can to stay connected to Jesus. That is the secret of discipleship. It is staying connected. It is being in touch with and staying in touch with Jesus. Are you a disciple?

Do you pray this way: Lord, keep me in touch with you, let me stay in touch with Jesus. Keep me connected, Lord.”

And the means of discipleship are contained in these two little words in v. 17, “Follow me, Jesus said.” You know what part of the problem may be in the American church’s ability to produce disciples? We spend an enormous amount of time teaching people to be leaders and virtually no amount of time in teaching people to become followers. That the essential calling of a disciple is not become a leader, let me show you how to increase your influence, leader. Let me teach you the five prerequisites of leading. The essential calling of every disciple is that you need to become the very best follower that you can possibly be.

I have three shelves of books in my personal library on leadership. I read just an enormous amount of material on leadership both from secular management and

business perspectives, as well as more from a Christian pastoral perspective. I have sat through a lot of seminars by very gifted teachers on leadership. I have heard probably 100 tapes on the subject of leadership. I don't own one book called "Spiritual Followership." Lincoln on Leadership; Attila the Hun on Leadership; Ghengis Khan on Leadership; How Leaders are Made; The Effective Leader; Leading the Church; Spiritual Leadership. Not one book on followership. No "how to follow seminars," no making your boss's job easier by following better. And yet the bottom line of Christian discipleship is these two words, "Follow me." Yet the truth is, the vast majority of people spend the vast majority of their life following not leading.

Think about instances where you see a pastor fall into sin. The pastor is caught in adultery or with their hand in the till or becomes heretical in doctrine. Or a Televangelist or Christian school teacher or principal or board member, elder, deacon, kinship leader – when someone holds a position in the church and has to be removed from leadership is it because they failed in some leadership principle? Almost never. Are people disciplined because they failed as leaders? Virtually never. Almost always people are disciplined because they fail as followers of Jesus. They have stepped out of line. They stopped following and have started to go their own way. They broke ranks with the Lord. A disciple stops being a disciple when they stop following.

The call to follow Jesus is a continual call, it is not a one-time choice. It is a continual choice. Will you take the next step ahead with me? In John 6:66, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Jesus said some hard things. Some of the people who had been disciples turned back and

stopped following him. And when you stop following Jesus, you stop being a disciple. If you won't take the next step with Jesus – hard one, easy one, in your marriage – the next step of obedience, if you won't take the next step forward, you stop being a disciple. Discipleship is all about following him. Are you a disciple?

I want to underline this for you. What caused Peter's collapse? When Peter denied the Lord three times; when his faith caved in. Was the problem a problem of leadership? In the crucial moment, did Peter's leadership skills fail? Did he not have enough leadership resources? Was the problem that he had not gotten enough leadership training? Hadn't read the latest books?

No, the Bible is real clear. What caved in was Peter's followership. I want you to see this. This is a crucial verse. In Luke 22:54, "Then seizing him [meaning Jesus], they led him away and took him into the house of the High Priest. [Here are the key words and you can underline this] Peter followed at a distance." Peter followed at a distance. The connection between Peter and Jesus became thinner and thinner. The line between Peter and Jesus became more and more stretched until it finally snapped. It was his followership. That is what caved in. And that is what always caves in when someone sins in a big way. Just look at their lives and what you will see is at some point the person stopped following.

Friend, I will ask you this personal question: When you have suffered collapse in your life – some of you were Christians and walked away from your marriages. Some of you were Christians and had sex outside of marriage. Some of you were Christians and found yourself addicted to certain substances or behaviors. Some of you were Christians and found yourselves filling your life with more and more work,

things, decorating, leisure, hobbies, and sports. Do you see that the problem before any collapse was, if you trace back in time, that at some point you stopped following Jesus. You broke ranks with him.

You say, "Rich, how do I follow Jesus? What does it mean?"

I mean you do everything to stay connected with him.

Where do I find him?

I find Jesus in the fellowship of his people. "Where two or three are gathered, there he is in the midst of us." (Matt 18:20)

So if I want to follow Jesus and stay connected with him, I am going to stay connected with fellowship. I have never seen a Christian who voluntarily isolates themselves from fellowship do well. Yes, there are Christians who are imprisoned around the world for their faith; they are locked up in solitary confinement. Jesus seems to make special provision for those who are involuntarily cut off from fellowship. But for those who can, if they chose to, be around other Christians and choose not to because they choose to put something else before Christian fellowship and relationship, the link between them and Jesus gets more and more stretched and the followership gets cut.

Now we have said to you over and over again: Get involved in a small group here. Get involved with one of our groups. And now I am going to implore you this way as a pastor. Stop saying "no" to Jesus. When you say no to fellowship and connection in a small group, you are saying "no" to Jesus who dwells in the midst of his people. We together are the body of Christ. We meet with Jesus not only alone, but with the community and the fellowship of his people.

We stay connected to Jesus by digging into the Word. I love and want to affirm those of you who are digging into Jesus' words on a regular basis. You are mining the scriptures. You are digging in and studying. And in that process you are looking for Christ. Now, it is possible to study and not look for Jesus. But if you are looking for Christ, you can't do better than to look for him in his Word.

You stay connected with Jesus by opening up your soul to him in prayer. By coming to him throughout the day, but also at some point by looking at him in a concentrated way and drinking from the fountain.

What happens to those who follow him and stay connected to him? It says in v. 17, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." You, with all that you are, become, as Jesus says, "fishers of men." Inadequate you; fearful you; not together you – I will transform you into something that you could never be on your own.

The key task of any Christian disciple is to catch people for Jesus. To connect people with Jesus. Are you a disciple?

Some years ago I read an amusing parable about a fishless fisherman. It was written by a Mennonite. I won't read the whole thing, but the author is named John Drescher. And excerpting this from Drescher's parable, here is what he said:

"It came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. There were so many fish in the waters around and the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes, filled with fish and the fish were hungry. Week after week, month after month, year after year, those who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish – the abundance of fish; how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means,

defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fishermen. They continually searched for new and better methods of fishing and new and better definitions of fishing. They came up with slogans like 'Fishing is the task of every fisherman' and 'Every fisherman is a fisher.' They sponsored fisherman campaigns for fishermen to fish. They had nationwide conferences to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and to hear about all the new ways of fishing and fishing equipment and new fishing calls. They built a fishing headquarters. They pleaded that everyone should first and foremost be a fisherman. They built training centers and courses were offered on the needs of fish, the natures of fish, where to find fish, the psychological reactions of fish, approaches and feeding of fish. People had doctorates in fishology – and after years of training, folks graduated and were given fishing licenses. Some people went overseas to fish after studying the habits of overseas fish. Huge amounts of money went into printing fishing guides. Presses were kept busy both day and night to produce materials totally devoted to fishing manuals and to programs. One thing no one ever did was fish. They lived near the fish. They talked about the fish. They discussed the importance of fishing. They trained in fishing. They read books and books and books on fishing and taught courses and courses and courses on fishing. One thing no one ever did was fish."

So Drescher asks the question: Can you say that you are a fisherman if you never fish?

I would ask the more fundamental question from Jesus' statement in Mark 1: Can you say that you are a disciple if you never fish? Jesus says that following him will

result in you becoming a fisher of men. Can you say you are a disciple if you never fish?

And you understand that by fishing we mean reaching out to other people? Sharing with them your faith in Jesus Christ. It is reaching out, connecting and sharing with them your faith in Jesus Christ. Let me ask you: Why don't you fish for people? Why don't you?

May I suggest a few reasons why? We don't fish when our faith is not very real to us. If you are not following Jesus closely, you are probably not fishing because your faith is not very vibrant, it is not alive. You can't give out of an empty box. You can't give what you don't have. The call to fish is not enough. We share our faith out of an overflow of a life of connectedness with Christ.

I think we don't fish because we don't have much first hand experience with Christ. I think we don't fish because we are afraid. Afraid we don't know enough; afraid of offending; afraid we don't know how to start; afraid of being marked out too distinctly. It would be embarrassing for us to so closely identify with Christ. And so even though we might have many opportunities in the office, in the home, we are afraid of standing up and being counted. And it is really funny because we don't need to be afraid. There are so many people who are just ever so ready to hear about Jesus. God has given us his Holy Spirit so that fear can be banished. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You shall be my witnesses.

The Spirit not only brings power into our lives, but love. There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear. We need to bring God our fear and ask his love and to fill us with his Holy Spirit to empower us.

I remember one young woman who was down at the OSU Oval when I was doing open air preaching. She said, "I am terrified. I am just terrified." We prayed that God would banish fear from her heart. She sat down next to someone and talked with them and by the end of the day, she was going off like a bottle rocket and told me what a joy and privilege it was for her to be out there. That she had the opportunity to actually lead someone to Christ. And there wasn't any trace of fear any more – just joy in the Holy Spirit.

This week is a week for you to fish. We are bringing in one of the world's really great communicators of the gospel. This week is the week for you to follow Jesus and fish. To grab some cards and invite some friends or neighbors to the marriage night or the singles night or to church next weekend when J. John is going to be here. Why should you do it even if you are afraid? Why should you do it if you feel like you don't have all the answers? Why should you do it and stand up and be counted? Why? Because that person you are thinking about inviting matters to God. That is the first reason. Your neighbor matters to God. They matter to God enormously. Your family member matters to God. Your spouse matters to God. Your parent matters to God. The Son of God bled and died for the person you can invite.

The second reason you should invite someone is because you do have the answer to life's ultimate question: How can a person enter a relationship with God? You have the cure. That person you can invite is going to die and end up eternally judged. You have the answer. All you need to do is share it. Invite them. Go ahead and cross the street and knock on the door and invite. Go ahead and pick up the phone and call. Go ahead and go to the next office and speak to your office mate and

say, “Will you come with me? Can we have dinner beforehand?” Again, let me ask you a question: Are you a disciple? Do you fish for people?

Now there is a cost in being a disciple. In v. 18 it says, “They dropped their nets and followed him.” It says: “When he had gone a little farther he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother in a boat preparing their nets. Without delay, he called them and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boats with the hired men and followed him.”

There is a cost. You can’t be a disciple of Jesus without paying a cost, without giving something up. These men had to give up their nets and their businesses. Everyone Jesus calls must give something up, to be his disciple. Giving something up is a prerequisite of a disciple. And that something is not necessarily sin. Sin is something you just repent of. The men in this story weren’t told to stop sinning. The thing they had to give up was their business. There isn’t anything wrong with fishing – it is a good thing. The thing that Jesus might call you to give up may be a good thing.

You say: “What might Jesus wants me to give up?”

Whatever is getting in the way of your relationship with Jesus, whatever is getting in the way of your connecting with Jesus, whatever is getting in the way of your fulfilling the specific call he has on your life, that thing must be given up. Again, whatever is getting in the way of your relationship with Jesus or your specific call must be given up. It could be a neutral thing, not a terrible thing.

For us as a family we needed to give up TV. Six months ago we got cable. We never had cable before. We lived with four channels. It was OK. But then our

antenna broke and I needed to buy a new antenna and run wire down. So I said, "Why don't we look into cable?" And so we opened the door of our house and let the monster of cable T.V. in in and we just got consumed.

I wish I could say that Marlene and the kids got consumed, while I prayed for them to become convicted of the error of their ways. I started off with the History Channel. I said, "Wow. I love the History Channel. This is so great. I love history." And news...and sports...and strong men competitions...and Nick at Night...and I Love Lucy. And this stupid thing, this stupid thing called cable TV has been getting in the way of my relationship and my family's relationship with Christ.

TV is not a sin. I am not trying to lay legalism on you. In our family's life, it was just getting in the way – So we had to give it up.

The good thing might be a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend. It is getting in the way of your relationship with Christ. Christ says, "For now, cut it off. This is a season for you to focus on me."

The good thing might be career options. As a woman, you have just wonderful career options. But you had a baby, or are having a baby, and you hear the call of God to raise that child and to be the child's full-time mother. And you can't follow the call of God to be a full-time mother and also advance your career now. You have to give up your career for now.

You might be a dad who has an opportunity to advance in a company or to make a move and make more money. But it is going to take away from your calling as a father and your calling in ministry. And so to be a disciple means you need to give up the opportunity for more money, or more status.

Following Jesus costs. It costs relationships. Not just things. These men left their father. James and John left their father, Zebedee, behind. Everyone who has been in missions knows this one. I am going to the other side of the world, mom and dad, brother and sister, friend...it costs.

What does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus? It can cost you things. It will cost you relationships. It ultimately will cost your life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred for his Christian faith, was a German who was killed by the Gestapo in WWII, he was martyred for his faith, began his book on the cost of discipleship this way: "Everyone who Christ calls, he bids them come and die..."

What do I mean that it costs your life? To be a disciple of Jesus means that you give up your ambitions, your dreams of what you wanted to accomplish by age 30 or age 40. You submit all your plans for the age you are supposed to be married by, your dream of a business your dream of a house, your dream of living out in the country and having your little farm and puttering around in your garage and fixing up your pretty little farm house. All of that goes by the boards – all the dreams that you had and all the ambitions. All the fantasies about what life is like. All of that is put on the altar. When Jesus calls a man or woman, he bids them, "Come and die."

And in all of it, we don't get to pat ourselves on the back and say, "Aren't we heroic? Aren't we something? We gave up [blank]..."

Let me finish with a few thoughts. So much of conservative evangelicalism is infected by what I heard John Piper talk about the other night: the spirit of the heroic. Aren't we something? We gave up so much for Jesus. Look at David

Brainard choking blood as he wanted to share his faith to Native Americans. Look at John Wesley walking in the snow – aren't we something. Never before Jesus. Whatever we put on the altar, never before Jesus, are we allowed to say, "Look at how much we gave up." That is a horrible thing. There is probably nothing less pleasing to the ears of Jesus than "Look at how much I have given up for you."

Have you ever heard someone say that? Talk about how much they have given up? Is it not one of the most unpleasant things in the world? A mother reminds her children, "I sat up with you for nights. I took care of you when you were sick. I gave up so much for you." There is nothing more horrible than listening to that.

Jesus says that with him there is never any ultimate loss. When we deny ourselves, it turns out for our gain. We give nothing up that we don't get back a hundred fold he says. In this life and in the life to come, houses, homes, brothers and sisters and fields and property – Jesus always gives us more than we give up. He always provides. Note the father of James and John was not left alone. There were hired men there. The business went on. God always provides where he guides. He always touches all the bases. There is no, "Well I would give it up, but what about my family, what about my spouse?" God always provides where he calls. As long as we know that he has called, he will provide. And he will touch all the bases.

Are you following hard after Jesus?

Are you fishing?

Are you paying the price of discipleship?

Are you a disciple?

Let's pray.