

The summer Anita and I got married I spent the weeks leading up to that wonderful event as the on-site director for Camp Grier. Most of the summer was spent handling administrative issues, but sometimes I got to be with the campers having fun. Many times I was the authority figure when there was a problem. I have a vague memory of a conversation with some boys who had been part of a very rare event at Camp Grier – a fight between campers.

I recall these events from what later happened. The Bible passage for Bible study that day had been one of the stories of the calling of the disciples, and the promise of Jesus that those who followed him would become “fishers of men.” That is the way the Bible we were using stated it then.

As it happened a group of campers and their counselors had scheduled a time of fishing from the walkway that used to extend across the top of the dam on Lake Refuge. Who knows how these things happen, but one camper, using an overly enthusiastic casting motion, got his hook caught in some part of the anatomy of his female counselor. In the many things that happen over a week at camp, I am confident this information was reported; but memory serves me that also with the help of the other counselor and the camp nurse the hook was

extracted, and in the multiple events of the day the camp had moved on to other matters.

The fight broke out over the teasing the camper was receiving from his fellow campers who said to this boy that he had taken Jesus' words about fishing too seriously, and also saying he had made a mistake because he had in fact been a fisher of women. Somewhere in all of that the youngster lost his cool.

Fishing has its dangers, not the least of which is the hook and its propensity to lodge in any number of things that are not fish – branches, clothing, bystanders, etc. For the uninitiated there are also the hazards of dealing with live bait and the problem of what to do with the actual fish once it has been landed. The smell of fish can endure on the skin and in clothing a long time.

It makes me wonder about the enduring odor on Jonah, who, the story so famously tells us, spent three whole days in the belly of a fish. It seems to fit the character of this reluctant prophet, who so disliked the Ninevites that he ran away from his deep conviction and calling from God that he must speak to the

Ninevites and warn them to change their ways. His character was such that even though he knew God would show them mercy if they repented, Jonah did not want to give them the chance. And Jonah was right. God saw the Ninevites change their ways and put trust in God and have hope that God might show them mercy. And Jonah is filled with rage.

Last week in our Coffee Talk class about the sixth deadly sin which is Envy, we learned that the real sin of envy is not wanting what someone else has, it is the dark glee felt when we see someone lose what we envy, regardless of whether we get it or achieve it at all. It is a dark desire to see another person fail badly. In the telling of the story of Jonah it seems fitting that Jonah would wind up stinking like a fish.

In the end, the story of Jonah is not so much about the Ninevites and their repentance as it is about Jonah and his unwillingness to trust the greater and bigger purpose of God; and to let the hope and trust he has in God extend beyond himself to other people. It is about allowing a vision of God, who wants everyone to join in the great family of God, to guide thoughts and actions, and to rejoice in the mercy and love of God. God's love creates

opportunities and brings about the unexpected. That is what we learn when we take the risk of trusting God and acting humbly and simply; when we give up our tendency to determine and control the outcomes.

Some thirteen years into our marriage I was back at Camp Grier spending a week as camp pastor. We were studying the parables that summer. It was a good volunteer job, leading Bible study all day and then chilling out at night. I was invited to cook outs, which was fun – though you have to make sure your meat and potatoes are really cooked on those hobo dinners.

After we ate and cleaned up from our cookout I went on a night walk with the counselors and campers down to Lake Refuge where we lay on our backs and looked up at the stars. The counselor told the campers a funny story about how when he had been a camper there as a little kid he had hooked his counselor with a fish hook. Several of the campers had stories of having done the same thing to their mother or their dad or a grandparent or a brother or sister. Who knew? And when this general buzz died down the counselor went on to tell of how bad he felt about having hooked his counselor. He had already been a homesick camper and after messing up fishing he felt like he

wanted to go home, he was so miserable; but his counselor had come to him and she spoke to him so kindly and so sweetly, with such understanding, forgiving him and caring about him, that he felt like God had come down to him to love him right when he needed it most.

It was quiet again for a moment. And he spoke one more time. “That’s why I’m a counselor here with you guys right now.”

Jesus said, “Follow me.” Those folks he called were not perfect. Some of them were vindictive and would have rejoiced in the downfall and suffering of their enemies. Some of them were filled with self-doubt. Jesus had faith, not just in them, though he did have some faith in them as people, Jesus had faith in the wonderful, creative power of God. Only God’s mysterious power works in the hearts of people so that they come to that moment when they realize the way they have been living is no good, and they decide to not live that way anymore. They decide to start down the path that leads where they really do not know, but it is a path of trusting God. It is the hope of God that teaches a believer that you really cannot go wrong with love. Others might call you soft, or try to convince you that wrath and punishment are

prerequisites for love. But love can never be found to have been wrong, whereas force and the use of power often are. Love is a sign of trust and faith in the One who is the author and best practitioner of love. Love always offers a yes to the promise of the love of God. When we love, we show that we are following Jesus.

“Follow me,” he said, “and I will make you fish for people.”

And so they left behind everything. And for the sake of Jesus, and the order he established in his words and actions, and in his death and resurrection, they followed him.

He is calling us still.