



Glendive/Wibaux United Methodist Church  
September 8, 2019

Matthew 4:19

Sermon Title: What's In Your Tackle Box? (REST)

A couple of Sundays ago, August 18, to be exact. I shared with you the results of the simple survey we did on where ya'll saw your church in a year and five years. If you recall, there were lots of comments on growth and fuller pews and improved finances. And a few about serving others. So, my message today and in the coming weeks and indeed months, is how do we get to the vision many folks have for Glendive UMC/Wibaux UMC.

Let us pray: God is love. Christ is love. Holy Spirit is love. Bring your love to each of this morning as we hear words and meditations that may be acceptable to you. Amen

Before I get started, I just need to get a read on the folks here today. How many of you are fishermen and women?

"Your husband seems to be very impatient lately."

"Yes, he is, very."

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is getting tired waiting for a chance to get out where he can sit patiently hour after hour waiting for a fish to nibble at his bait."

I think we, like many other congregations these days, are too patient ..... comfortable to just to sit and wait for a nibble. Yet, at the same time, impatient for things to change to get back to what used to be. Those places and times when we think we were happier. When church was a major part of community and family lives. We want to wait for the same old fish to take the same bait we've been throwing out for years. Same fishing hole. No acknowledgement that even marine life changes over generations.

Someone recently described the state of churches today as remaining in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when we're living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our situations have changed, but our behaviors have not. The world, our country, our families, our personal situations have changed but we're still using the same coping skills and processes and relationships and theology to live. And worse, to live out our Christian faith.

How will our fishing techniques, bait and favorite fishing holes need to change to reach some of those visions you have for your church?

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFE AND FUTURE YOU CAN LEARN FROM NOAH'S ARK.... Think about this in terms of where the church is and where you want to be in five years. Let's call it an Angler's Guide to living out our vision.

One: Don't miss the boat.

Two: Remember that we are all in the same boat.

Three: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

Four: Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big. Not only you, but the church.

Five: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.

Six: Build your future on high ground.

Seven: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.

Eight: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

Nine: When you're stressed, float a while. But you can't stay there

Ten: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

Eleven: No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

As United Methodists, we have some pretty good things in our tackle box beside the Angler's Guide. We have the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This four-in-one tool is an essential multi use tool for catching fish; being fishers of men and women and children, as we are commanded.

The quadrilateral isn't something John Wesley set out to create, it's based on his inspiration and written words of wisdom. Our first tool is Reason. Our second tool is Experience. Our third tool is Scripture. And, our fourth tool is Tradition. Or REST. Now you can go to the UMC website and get illustrations of these elements. But I want to share with you a Cliff Notes version.

REST is not in order of prominence but an easy way to remember the components. **Scripture** is the foundation of our life; life work, life balance, life commitment to Christ. Without Scripture, the other parts would fall down and be useless, like a three-legged chair. What did Jesus say and do? How did he teach us using parables and metaphors and eventually sacrificing himself for us? Therefore, we need to be challenged and made uncomfortable sometimes. Life isn't about avoiding pain at all costs, avoiding discomfort and change, because Jesus was ALLLLL over that idea. And this is what scripture teaches.

I'll bet we can all think of at least 2 or three people Jesus made uncomfortable when he asked them to change. It's in the New Testament, anyone can read it. Indeed, Jesus insisted they change. And because interpretation of Scriptures is dynamic and progressive, we can learn from it today as well as those who first read it. It's irrelevant to me if you believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God. From Genesis to Revelation,

you believe everything written is from God's lips and is a true and accurate reflection of what actually occurred. That's fine with me and with many others. However, I think you all know that United Methodists are not biblical literalists. We believe, with the guidance of the Holy Advocate and reading Scripture, we are inspired by the writers of those 66 books to live and love as God intends. Scripture gives us the righteous pathway forward.

**Tradition** is one of our theological tasks. Like knowing what fish will go after what bait. We didn't go from Christ on the cross to September 8, 2019. Much happened in those intervening years and continues to happen through cultural shifts around the world and in this country. The 2016 Book of Discipline reminds us that, "these various traditions include mixtures of ignorance, misguided zeal, and sin. Scripture remains the norm by which all traditions are judged." (2016 BOD, ¶ 105, pg 85) Conflicting traditions need to be compared against the foundation of Scripture. For instance, Methodists don't consider marriage a sacrament. Primarily because Christ, while he attended a wedding in Cana, did not perform a marriage. The tradition of sacramental marriage progressed over time in certain cultural contexts and lives on today. And the use of the word tradition, does not pertain to local church traditions, but to the work of the early churches. As we know, sometimes those sacred cows in local churches make the best hamburger.

"Our **experience** interacts with Scripture. We must read Scripture in the light of conditions and events that help shape who we are, and we interpret our experiences in terms of Scripture." (2016 BOD ¶105, pg 87) We cannot ignore our lives today and what's happened in the past. They are part of who we are. Part of who we are individually and communally in a congregation. For instance, my experience with a church staff member embezzling and mishandling church funds, informs my concerns that all church matters be in order. This is called good stewardship, something we are called to be engaged with. But, again with the guidance of the Holy Spirit through Scriptures we can come out of a period of church discord with a greater understanding of God's mercy and grace and forgiveness. Our experience informs how we read and interpret Scripture. If you've been harmed by a church, you read scripture differently than someone who hasn't had a bad experience. If a friend swears she catches trout with bits of bacon and it never works for you, you'll go back to the Angler's Guide and use insects, crawfish and minnows. Your experience is not the same as another's.

Let me read you what the Book of Discipline says about **reason**. "By reason we read and interpret Scripture. By reason, we determine if our Christian witness is clear. By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God's actions and will. By reason we organize the understandings that compose our witness and render them internally coherent. By reason we test the congruence of our witness to the biblical testimony and to the traditions that mediate that testimony to us. And, by reason we relate our witness to the full range of human knowledge, experience and service." (BOD ¶ 105 pg 88)

There endeth the lesson from the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, our Angler's Guide. Jesus said, leave what you've been doing, those nets and tools and boats and personal tackle boxes and follow him. He would make them and us new kinds of fisherman. When we read scripture through the lens of REST, we can figure out the best bait and the best places to find those disciples of Jesus Christ who will make the world a better place.

You want to have growth in the congregation? Get out of the comfort zone and go to where the harvest is rich, but laborers are few. You want a more stable financial situation, trust in God as Noah did, even in his doddering old age. Because you're never too old to be asked to do something new. You want more young people in the church, use the right bait and I don't mean drums and basketball hoops. Show them how this church serves others, is active in social justice concerns that affect their future and what they're passionate about.

Finally, someone wanted to see the paraments and banners changed in the next five years. Then what, using REST, should you do? Do something: act, volunteer, offer to change them, offer to buy new ones, sacrifice your time for others.

Folks, it's time to fish or cut bait. This expression has several origin stories but for today, I like two. One that explains it as we should either try to catch fish or cut up bait for others to use. You can either fish or cut bait. Take your pick. The other interpretation is that of a person sitting with a fishing rod and bait on the hook, but who is not actually fishing. This person is just wasting time. He or she should either start to fish or release the bait. (<https://writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary/fish-or-cut-bait>, September 3, 2019)

Are you going to join me, the children of this church and others here to fish? Or be content to sit back and let others do the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ? You have the tools, now use them.

Amen and Selah