



# KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

**Fair and Foul Fish**

**Sermon: Steve Stanis**

**7 March 2021**

## A FISHY STORY... ENCOURAGING US TO SCALE THE DEPTHS

### Intro: Two events, two reminders!

- Fishing
- Gardening

I went fishing a couple of weeks back. I went with Alex, Linda's husband. I didn't go because I love fishing, although I had a great day out. I went because I wanted to share Alex's passion. He loves to fish and talking to him about it caused me to want to go and see fishing through his eyes. This (*picture*) wasn't the only fish we caught that day but none came home. They were all undersized and so, released back into the water.

Fishing with Alex reminded me of last week's parable about the hidden treasure. As Tony said last Sunday, where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Where is my passion? When we are in conversation with people, is our passion for Jesus evident? Do people want to stay with us and see Jesus through our eyes? Do we open for them, through our words and deeds, the Kingdom of Heaven and a reflection of Jesus?

This past week I experienced another very live and visual moment relating to these parables. I am neither an effective fisherman nor gardener. The garden in my back yard was an overdue field of work! The weeds in the open garden were in full view! I was ready to wash my hands having completed the task of pulling weeds, when a small pink flower caught my eye. A closer look revealed a tree/bush that was masking the shame of my garden. A closer inspection prickled my hand!

Could it be...?! (Ironically given my last sermon on the gravity of the hidden lantana!) Yes! Thick, hardy and great

volumes of lantana later took up a significant section of my large green bin! Such a subtle and devious weed!

Remember we coexist together - the weeds and the wheat, the good fish and the bad fish.

## **The Context – The Kingdom of God**

- **Kingdom fully revealed in the end – Stories of Weeds, and the Dragnet**
- **Kingdom is Present and Growing in the World – Stories of the Soils, and Mustard Seed**
- **Kingdom is beyond value - Stories of Treasure and Pearl**

Each of these seven parables from Matthew 13 have shown us that God's kingdom is present in the world, without exception, right now, and that he is the one growing the kingdom and bearing fruit (the Sower, the Weeds, the Mustard Seed and the Leaven). God's kingdom presence is Jesus himself - God in human likeness in the world. Jesus invites all who hear his words to seek out this kingdom and respond to it wholly and completely (per the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value). Our response must be to patiently keep growing and going on. The outcome is not in our control.

And so we catch a glimpse of how the kingdom of heaven will be worked out at the end of the age, when the history of Creation comes to its completion. The parables of the Weeds and the Dragnet both speak of the "end of the age"; they both speak to a coming day of judgement and they both emphasise that it is God who will sort the good from the bad. But note that these two parables occur in the midst of a series of stories explaining the kingdom of

heaven. They need to be understood in this context, rather than taken as independent teachings on God's judgement.

*Let me read today's parable.*

*47 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

## **The Challenge –**

- **Inclusive not Exclusive**
- **Distinctive but not separate**

When fishing with Alex (hook, line and sinker) we had to determine, as we caught them, whether each fish was acceptable. In the parable, it was very different!

A net is thrown into the sea; this is net fishing on lake Galilee.

A dragnet is a net thrown out from a boat, or between two boats, and then dragged along. The net catches everything below the surface - fish, seaweed, rusty parts, broken shells and so on. The net gathers up all things.

This is the mission of the church for the kingdom of heaven. It is to gather into the net all things with discernment but without discrimination. The church keeps dragging the net until we reach the other shore, where God will send his angels to sort it all out.

Sadly, as a church, we try to sort the fish as we go. We are so good at drawing distinctions between “them” and “us”. It’s the way we form our church identity; we are this and not that; we believe this and not that; we behave this way and not that way. We put up the boundaries we believe are right. How many people have been hurt and excluded by our prejudices?

In trying to remove or exclude “bad” fish, we actually remove some who God will show to have been very good fish.

2 Timothy 2:19 stresses that God alone knows!

*19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*

## **The Criteria –**

- **Grace alone**
- **Grace outworking – Choosing to do “good”**

Here is the seal of the true church - it is twofold - God knows who belongs and, if you think you belong, then you need to depart from wickedness. This is a deliberate action. We need a deep determination in our hearts, because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to depart from wickedness. The Bible does not say that all who belong to God will never fall but they will make the conscious choice to do good in the Name of Christ.

As Christ’s body on Earth, we are set apart but we are called to be salt and light in the world, not removed from the world. The leaven works through the whole batch of dough, the whole field is sown, the net drags through the

whole sea gathering up everything in its path. We must be distinct but not separate. We should be inclusive, not exclusive.

Matthew 5 says:

*<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

In this parable the words good and bad are used. This is not a moral judgement but based on their usefulness to the fisherman. It is completely up to the sorters what they believe is useful or beautiful. What will the angels be looking for as they sort through all people?

A short aside. My immigrant Greek father in the 1950s said that octopus was the rubbish that the fish markets all but threw away. It was of no value – cheap as chips! In a very local mono-cultured part of Sydney, my dad knew how to prepare melt in your mouth delicious octopus. All who Dad cooked for learnt to love this sea fare. My friends knew I was a little unusual when they noticed I was taking octopus sandwiches to school. My father laments that octopus today has become an expensive delicacy.

Remember, it is completely up to the sorters what they believe is useful or beautiful. What will the angels be looking for as they sort through all people?

The angels are looking to bring the Kingdom of God to its fulness. In this time as God extends his love, his grace and his forgiveness, God wants us all to be reconciled to him. Through Jesus' saving work on the cross, he bore the

judgement for each of us. He bore it out of God's unending love and his faithfulness to the covenant he made with his people. We do not enter the Kingdom of Heaven based on anything we can do. We cannot be good enough to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or bad enough to be left out. We will only be there on account of God's grace.

Colossians 3:3-4

*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Even though all are invited and accepted, it is entirely possible to reject the work of Christ. This is the basis of the final sorting process!

NT Wright said

*"There is only one great treasure, one great pearl. But the decision to find it, seek it out, gather it up, give everything to have it, is an urgent decision. History isn't going around in circles. All of history is moving toward this final end, toward the time when God's kingdom of justice, righteousness, wholeness, peace, and love will be finally complete. It will be the time when every knee really will bow down before the God of heaven and earth. It will be a time when people from all times and places will gather around the wedding feast of the Lamb."*

At another place (Matthew 4:19) Jesus calls people to be fishers of men. It must be our mission at KAC to keep casting this net of God's good news. It is never our mission to sort anything out, simply to cast the net. However, in this parable of God's Kingdom we are cast as the fish, not the fishermen!

## The Conclusion –

- **Freedom to be and to become our uniquely created selves captured by Jesus.**

I think this passage actually takes the pressure off. How often do we hear a message and feel guilty that we should be out knocking on doors but we feel shy or don't know what to say? We feel guilty that others seem to find hospitality so easy but the anxiety it causes in us is crushing. We believe in Mission but the thought of going to India horrifies us...the toilets are different!

This passage says to me that God has put you here in this life, so live it for him. Live it with the people you rub shoulders with. As God's people, we must look different to the world around us. We must hold onto our first love; Jesus must be our passion. As Revelation 2:4-5 says, we must never abandon the love we first had when we first understood the great news of salvation through Jesus. We must respond as light in a dark world that needs hope and peace. As the world spreads messages of fear and uncertainty, we must not be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of our minds. We must not let the world tell us how to respond. We must go to the Word of God as our guide. My daily Wayne Pickford "thought for the day" came from Greg Laurie,

*"Jesus did not say that the world should go to church, He said the church should go out into the whole world."*

Be assured and reassured that God knows your heart. He knows your strengths, your weaknesses, your gifts, and God is at work in you (whether you are a Nemo or a Dory or some other fish). He is a promise keeper. He has prepared your place in his kingdom for all who trust in him. God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.