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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

MARCH 13, 2005

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: This has been really kind of fun
2 for me, this whole series of fishing, and I'm kind of a
3 frustrated fisherman.

4 I don't get out as much as I want and I don't get
5 to spend as much time near or on the water.

6 I lament that. That's not an excuse, I realize
7 that.

8 I'm hoping this spring to get out and get after
9 them a little bit.

10 But spring is not here yet, so we have been using
11 this opportunity of fishing the living water.

12 My theme today is the catch and release program
13 that God has for us.

14 We have been caught, but the challenge is that some
15 of us, when we are caught, we become kind of like a fish, we
16 just kind of lay there and then aren't released from the
17 past and released to then go and do our own fishing.

18 Grab your Bibles. Matthew 13 is a fascinating
19 chapter.

20 My kids are a little older now. My son is 18 and
21 my daughter is 22, which is amazing in and of itself.

22 But they don't really don't do this anymore, but
23 they used to do this when this Valley Girl phenomenon was
24 going around.

25 I know some parents still roll their eyes when

1 their kids do this, like, like, like, well, you know, and
2 then she like, you know, oh, she like, she like held my hand
3 like, oh, and like, like, like.

4 Jesus is doing a little of that today. The kingdom
5 of heaven is like.

6 But Jesus is not the valley guy; he's the peak and
7 the valley guy.

8 And so I want to run you into that chapter, because
9 I think the key to understanding this net parable is to see
10 some of the other ones.

11 So we need to look in that 13th Chapter. I'm going
12 to keep you right on this same page.

13 Some of the Bibles are paged differently, but I'm
14 on page 14, and it's going to be right around there in your
15 New Testament.

16 If you didn't bring your own we do provide them,
17 but we have a couple different ones floating around the
18 room.

19 So here is part of Jesus doing this like thing. In
20 Matthew 13:31 he says:

21 "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed."

22 And then in 33 he says it's like yeast.

23 And then he says in verse 44 it's like a treasure
24 hidden in a field.

25 In 45 it's like a merchant in search of fine

1 pearls.

2 And then he hits us with the like a net, but we
3 need to slow down a little bit and see the context of this.

4 Again, he's just peppering his audience here with
5 different teachings.

6 And I think it's really important for us to see
7 Verses 44 and following there so that we get where he's
8 going with this net thing.

9 So we need to take a little closer look at those
10 two rapid-fires.

11 Those are about the briefest parables that he uses
12 in the whole Bible, the one about the merchant and the one
13 about the treasure hidden in the soil.

14 So look at Verse 44. "The kingdom of heaven is
15 like treasure hidden in a field which someone found and hid.
16 Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys
17 the field."

18 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in
19 search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value
20 he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

21 I want you to pay close attention to the farmer and
22 the merchant in those two parables.

23 Notice the total vulnerability of those two. They
24 sell all that they have.

25 The first one sells all that he has. The second

1 one went and sold all that he had.

2 What that suggests to us is absolute, complete
3 extension, total vulnerability. They are broke.

4 They have found the priceless treasure and they
5 cannot live without it.

6 They extend everything they've got now for that
7 particular gift that God has given us.

8 And so notice the power lies in the treasure and
9 the pearl; not the people.

10 Do you see that? The treasure and the pearl seem
11 to be totally passive, but actually they are totally active.

12 And, see, part of us wants to think that it's all
13 about humans are the ones that are active, but Jesus is
14 being very careful here of teaching us it's not about
15 activity, it's about my activity; not yours.

16 This merchant and this farmer are totally out
17 there.

18 It is absolute grace that they found this treasure,
19 this pearl, this wonderful gift of salvation, the kingdom of
20 heaven.

21 That is what the kingdom of heaven is. The source
22 of power are the treasure and the pearl. The farmer and the
23 merchant are powerless.

24 That is why we as a Lutheran church believe this is
25 good theology.

1 That it is not us; it's the bread and the wine that
2 work in us.

3 It's not about me. I'm passive to some extent.
4 It's about God. It's the same with the water.

5 It's not about us conjuring up the faith; it's
6 about God working in those elements of bread and wine.

7 It's the same thing. We are powerless. That's the
8 first and second step of a twelve step program.

9 Came to understand that I'm powerless. But there
10 is one who has power. God.

11 It's kind of a three step dance. I can't do it,
12 God can, and I'm going to let him.

13 That's what these parables are all about. So you
14 have to understand. That's where Jesus is coming from.

15 He's peppering them with these three powerless
16 stories.

17 So he hits us with those three and then he's going
18 to start telling his fish story.

19 The fish story, I would like to call it the good,
20 the bad, and the discarded. Kind of like a Clint Eastwood
21 movie.

22 But you can't really understand that until you
23 understand a couple concepts that are just rampant in the
24 Bible and in the Holy Land.

25 You need to understand the context is that

1 cleanliness was thought to be next to godliness.

2 And you probably have parents and grandparents that
3 have told you that same thing.

4 But theologically in the Jewish community they were
5 not only thought to be godliness, they were reckoned to be
6 righteousness.

7 In other words, the whole existence of the
8 community was based on clean and unclean.

9 And you are only supposed to hang with certain
10 people and those are people that are clean.

11 And you are only supposed to eat certain things and
12 those are things that are clean.

13 And to prove that to you I want you to join me in
14 the Bible, clear in the beginning parts of the Bible.

15 The first five books of the Bible are the law. The
16 law of Israel. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and
17 Numbers.

18 Take a look at Leviticus 11. Leviticus 11, I have
19 it on page 98 in my Bible, but yours might be a little
20 different.

21 What you need to see in this book of Leviticus is
22 what God is doing is he says right away, and if you have the
23 time, and you can go ahead and read it, if you want to have
24 some fun reading, read 11, 12, 13 and 14 this afternoon at
25 home, because this is all about the cleanliness of the

1 Jewish community, of the Israelites.

2 But 11:1, "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and he
3 says tell the people this, speak to them saying."

4 Now what he's going to do is he's going to tell
5 them the things they can eat and the things they can't eat.

6 Right away then 11:2, "From among all the land
7 animals, these are the creatures that you may eat. Any
8 animal that has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed and chews
9 the cud, such you may eat."

10 That would be like a cow. You can have beef.

11 "But among those that chew the cud or have divided
12 hoofs you shall not eat the following: Camel," so I hate to
13 break it to you, but you're probably are not going to have
14 camel for brunch today.

15 No big deal for those of us that don't have camels
16 around. It gets more specific from there.

17 Then he talks about how you also better lay off
18 the rock badger in Verse 5.

19 That doesn't bother me either, because I've never
20 been a rock badger guy.

21 Then we get into Verse 6, "The hare," that's a
22 rabbit, "for even though it chews the cud, it does not have
23 divided hoofs, it's unclean for you."

24 He didn't want them eating rabbits, and I don't
25 know why, I've had hasenpfeffer down at the Bohemian Cafe

1 and I kind of like it, but I'm not Kosher, see, and I don't
2 practice the Kosher diet.

3 Notice then what he does. Then Verse 7, the pig,
4 this is why our Jewish brothers and sisters do not eat pork
5 products.

6 They are forbidden in the law and he says you just
7 need to lay off of that.

8 And the people kind of go why? Well, because they
9 are considered unclean, just like the camel, the rock
10 badger, the hare and pork products.

11 Think back. If you are four thousand years ago in
12 the desert, and you have a God who loves you, and you have
13 people that are eating all kinds of stuff around you and all
14 of a sudden they start dropping over dead, what is God going
15 to do?

16 He's going to say, you guys, lay off the pork
17 products. I have not invented refrigerators or freezers
18 yet.

19 God is a God of life; not a God of death. He wants
20 his people to be alive and healthy and well.

21 So there is a holiness and then it becomes
22 theological, because there is a whole way you are supposed
23 to wash your stuff and you are supposed to take care of
24 stuff.

25 There are certain people you should not associate

1 with.

2 Those are unclean people; they might be lepers;
3 they might be women who are having their monthly discharge,
4 you need to stay away from them.

5 But here is what I want you to see in Verse 9.

6 "These you may eat, of all that are in the waters.

7 Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether
8 in the seas or in the streams, such you may have. "

9 And I'm off the hook there. We had trout Friday
10 night. I'm okay.

11 But, look, "Anything in the sea or the streams that
12 does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in
13 the waters and among all the other living things that are in
14 the waters, they are detestable to you and detestable they
15 shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat and their
16 carcasses you shall regard as a detestable. Everything in
17 the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable
18 to you."

19 Now I'm in trouble, because we had shrimp last
20 Sunday, and you need to understand, this is what God is
21 saying.

22 He's basically telling them the things they can't
23 be eating anymore, but that's 11, 9 and 10.

24 "Anything that does not have fins and scales,
25 whether in the seas or in the streams, such you may not

1 eat."

2 Crabs. Lobsters, octopus, shrimp, oysters, clams,
3 and you may say to me, what is the deal with that?

4 Is God such a killjoy that he doesn't want people
5 eating those things?

6 No, but consider the context again, and I was just
7 talking to somebody before the worship service, and if you
8 have an allergy to shell fish you know what is going on.

9 If you have ever had linguini with bad clam sauce
10 you know what is going on. God doesn't want you to go down
11 that path.

12 But you see what happens then is God is a God of
13 abundant life, so much so that he sends Jesus, and Jesus
14 changes everything.

15 He doesn't throw the law out, but he gives it a
16 totally different understanding.

17 So now we fast forward to the New Testament Book of
18 Acts.

19 This is found in my Bible on page 1122, 10th
20 Chapter.

21 But it's interesting because the disciple Peter is
22 the one who got out of the boat, tried to walk on the water
23 and sank, but Jesus keeps reinventing him and reinviting him
24 into his future, because he fails, but he's this perfect
25 quintessential model of what the church is.

1 We sink, but we get back up. He's a rock, he's
2 solid, but he denies, he is just like you and me.

3 But notice him in the Book of Acts, the 10th
4 Chapter, what he's doing here is he's going to have a dream.
5 Verse 9.

6 "About noon the next day, as they were on their
7 journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof
8 to pray. He became hungry and he wanted something to eat
9 and while it was being prepared he fell into a trance. He
10 saw the heavens open and something like a large sheet coming
11 down being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it
12 were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and
13 birds of the air and the voice said to him, "Get up, Peter,
14 kill and eat." Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have
15 never eaten anything that is profane or unclean."

16 "The voice said to him again, a second time, "What
17 God has made clean you must not call profane."

18 "This happened three times and the thing was
19 suddenly taken up into heaven."

20 What has happened is Jesus has changed everything,
21 and now all of a sudden the Holy Spirit has descended on
22 Peter, who was a good law-abiding Christian Jewish person
23 who thought that we still need to watch what we eat, but God
24 is saying if you are hungry get up and eat.

25 Those distinctions have been wiped away by the gift

1 of Jesus.

2 Right across the column Peter puts it all together,
3 Verse 34, "Peter began to speak to them. I truly understand
4 that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who
5 fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

6 It doesn't matter what your bloodline is. God
7 shows no partiality.

8 The reason we need to understand that is because
9 now we need to go back to the Matthew 13 story and we need
10 to look at the net with those eyes as well, as a somewhat
11 informed Jewish audience, Jewish Christian audience, the
12 first century.

13 Verse 47. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a
14 net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every
15 kind."

16 There would have been clams in there. There would
17 have been shrimp in there.

18 There would have been oysters in there. Maybe even
19 an octopi or two, along with trout, salmon, hering, all
20 different kinds.

21 "When it was full they drew it ashore and sat down
22 and put the good in the baskets, but threw out the bad."

23 They threw out the unclean. There is a difference
24 there.

25 But, see, here is where it gets real interesting

1 because we as Christians think we are so good at figuring
2 out at who is good and who is not.

3 And the Jewish people were guilty of the same
4 thing.

5 You could tell right away if somebody was Jewish by
6 their circumcision, but also just by their whole way they
7 lived their life.

8 And immediately God is setting this up. Well,
9 there is good and there is bad, and just make me the judge
10 and I can determine who is better.

11 But you see where this is going. Do you think
12 you're better than me?

13 What do you mean? I'm more righteous than you. I
14 give more money than you.

15 I go to church more often than you. I pray more
16 often than you.

17 I don't eat certain foods, or I don't drink certain
18 substances, I'm better than you.

19 But notice closely it's the same net. The net was
20 thrown into the sea. It caught fish of every kind.

21 Cleaning the fish is God's job. It's not your job
22 and it's not my job. And so is the sorting.

23 I'm not supposed to go around and do background
24 checks on you people, and you are not supposed to do them on
25 anybody else and say they need to be kicked out of the

1 church because they aren't quite as righteous, you should
2 see this guy, he or she is a total hypocrite. I see her out
3 in the real world. You should be kicking them out of this
4 church.

5 That's God's job; it's not our job. So is judging
6 the good and the bad.

7 And we see this really closely again in the 13th
8 Chapter.

9 If we had the time we would look real closely,
10 Jesus is telling this fascinating story about a farmer who
11 plants some wheat.

12 In the very same field with the wheat somebody
13 comes in the middle of night and they plant a bunch of
14 weeds.

15 And he tells the farmer, he says don't worry about
16 the weeds, I'll take care of them at the harvest.

17 Some people want to go around and they want to
18 pluck every little weed out of the garden instead of
19 worrying about the tender shoots that are just starting to
20 develop in the seed in the wheat field.

21 The same is true of the kingdom of God as far as
22 the good and the bad, the fish, we need to let them swim
23 freely. We can't be judging people and kicking them out.

24 I don't know if you've of ever seen the video Fish.
25 Has anybody in the business world or education world?

1 The fish philosophy is modeled off of a Pike's
2 Place fish market in Seattle.

3 We are so excited. Our son is moving to Seattle
4 this summer and we have visited this place a couple
5 different times.

6 It's an amazing store. They have these guys that
7 are just crazy that work in Pike's Place and they have so
8 much fun while they are working that they literally have
9 business people from the greater Seattle area that come at
10 3:00 o'clock in the morning just to be in their presence and
11 to shovel ice for their fish store.

12 Because they have got to go back to their real jobs
13 and it isn't near as much fun there.

14 But they say there is four fish philosophies.
15 Number one, be there.

16 In other words, if you are with somebody, be with
17 them. Don't act like, hey, how it's going, got to run, but
18 actually be with somebody.

19 Be there in their presence. This is how we fish.
20 How is it going? I really do want to know.

21 Look them in the eye. Make their day. Make them
22 think they are the most important person in the world.

23 Don't sit in judgment of them, but love them. Make
24 their day. Make them smile a little bit.

25 Choose your attitude. Yeah, I got a sore foot, I

1 got a new pair of shoes, but I'm going to choose to be
2 positive today, because a lot of times the only sermon
3 people hear is the one that's written on my face.

4 A guy sent me an E email this week. He said there
5 is a great one that says if you love Jesus you might let
6 your face know. A great one.

7 Choose your attitude, and I'm not saying rainbows
8 and moonbeams and happy-happy-happy.

9 I'm saying be there with people. Choose your
10 attitude of gratitude and thankfulness and forgiveness.

11 And, finally, have fun. For heaven's sake,
12 literally, have fun.

13 Whether it's in your workplace, your playspace, but
14 I bring it into the church today.

15 This is our opportunity as Christians. I read a
16 great quote this week, it said, "Sounding out bad news is
17 for fog horns. Not Christians. A fog horn warns nearby
18 vessels to stay clear. Fog horns know they're doing their
19 job when everybody stays away.

20 "A lot of Christians are that way. They like to
21 get up and say what is wrong instead of being there with
22 people, making someone's days, choosing a positive attitude,
23 and being grateful for whatever we've got, and having some
24 fun."

25 Again, Jesus references that patient farmer. He's

1 not blind to the weeds. He's not a dumb farmer.

2 He just knows that God will take care of the
3 harvest.

4 He doesn't need to, and it would be a waste of time
5 to go off and try to correct everybody.

6 I had a guy in my office this week, he was
7 crestfallen.

8 And one of the issues he was crestfallen about was
9 this murderer down in Wichita, Kansas, where this guy was
10 the church council president and he was a serial killer.

11 This guy was absolutely appalled that that church
12 let that guy be around there and didn't have him kicked out.

13 They didn't know. How would they? This guy's wife
14 didn't even know.

15 But it's not our job as churches to kick out people
16 of questionable character. If we did that it would just be
17 Brad and I here.

18 (Laughter)

19 That's not our job. We are to be in the welcoming
20 business; not the warning business.

21 That's why we wanted you to have these postcards,
22 and again I don't want you to just say I'm going to write
23 this to my brother, he's a pagan, I'm just going to put his
24 name on it and send it in the mail.

25 That's one way of doing it, but that's probably not

1 going to be effective.

2 You could write a nice little note on that. You
3 are going to need to put a stamp on it, by the way, because
4 the bulk thing won't work unless we send them all together
5 at one time.

6 So please put a postcard stamp on that, put
7 somebody's name on it, maybe a kind little note, be there
8 with somebody.

9 How is it going? What time can I pick you up on
10 Easter for worship services? And brunch is on me that day.

11 But, see, that's what fishing is about. Fishermen
12 don't use dynamite; they use love and patience and kindness.

13 I have a great quote again, "People these days are
14 not asking what must I do to be saved; they are asking what
15 must I do to survive, and when the church starts to answer
16 the survival question, revival will happen."

17 Individually, and also as a church, it's not our
18 job to save people.

19 But it is our opportunity to reach out to people
20 with some survival skills.

21 And when we do that there will be a revival in us.
22 Nothing feels better in the whole world.

23 I was reading a resource this week that talked a
24 little bit about some different metaphors and they were
25 encouraging people to write their own, what the kingdom of

1 heaven is like.

2 And Steven Covey tells this fascinating story. He
3 says the kingdom of heaven is like a subway ride, and
4 listen, this is fascinating to me, because I would encourage
5 you to write your own parable.

6 "I remember a paradigm shift I experienced one
7 Sunday morning in New York City on a subway. People were
8 sitting quietly, some reading newspapers, some lost in
9 thought, some resting with their eyes closed. It was a very
10 calm, peaceful scene.

11 "A man and his children entered the car. The
12 children were soon yelling back and forth, throwing things
13 and grabbing people's papers.

14 "It was very disturbing and yet the father sitting
15 next to me did absolutely nothing.

16 "It was difficult for me not to feel really
17 irritated.

18 "I could not believe he could be so insensitive as
19 to let his children run wild and do nothing about it.

20 "It was easy to see that everyone else on the
21 subway felt irritated, too, just like me.

22 "So finally, with what I felt was unusual patience
23 and restraint, I said, "Sir, your children are really
24 disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't
25 control them a little more?"

1 "The man lifted his gaze, as if coming to a
2 consciousness of the situation for the first time, and he
3 said softly, "Oh, I guess you're right. I'm sorry. I guess
4 I should do something about it. We just came from the
5 hospital where their mother died an hour ago. I don't know
6 what to think and I guess they don't how to handle it
7 either."

8 "Can you imagine how I felt at that moment," he
9 writes.

10 "Suddenly I saw things differently, and because I
11 saw things differently I thought differently. I felt
12 differently. I behaved differently. My irritation
13 vanished.

14 "I didn't have to worry about controlling my
15 attitude or my behavior. My heart was suddenly filled with
16 this man's pain.

17 "Feelings of sympathy and compassion flowed into me
18 and they flowed out of me.

19 "Your wife just died? I'm so sorry. Can you tell
20 me about it? Is there anything I can do to help?
21 Everything just changed in an instant."

22 That's the paradigm shift of understanding. Not to
23 be judging, but to be welcoming and loving.

24 Another one is, "The kingdom of heaven is like a
25 bee. A naturalist writes a story about bees recently. It

1 was most intriguing.

2 "One of the things he said about the honey bee was
3 that you can always keep bees, but you can never keep a
4 single bee.

5 "If you isolate a bee you can give it the most
6 favorable temperature for a bee, you can give it plenty of
7 water, plenty of flowers, plenty of food, and ideal habitat,
8 but that bee will die in less than two days.

9 "There is something about a community of bees that
10 keeps it alive.

11 "You can keep bees, but you cannot keep a single
12 bee. That's likewise true of Christian faith. You cannot
13 be a Christian by yourself. You are going to die. We are
14 called to buzz together."

15 We are called to fish. The kingdom of heaven is
16 like all those different things, fill in your blanks with
17 your own stories today. Take an opportunity.

18 For us today the kingdom of heaven is like a net,
19 and I have my old German net out of my office last night,
20 brought it into worship, got this telescopic deal on it, has
21 a metric measuring system on it, it's pretty cool, but
22 here's the deal.

23 We have been caught in the net, and for some
24 reason, not ours, God has judged us innocent, and clean, and
25 forgiven.

1 "The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into
2 the sea. It caught fish of every kind. When it was full
3 they drew it ashore and sat down and put the good into
4 baskets, but threw out the bad."

5 Most Christian focus on the last part.

6 "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels
7 will come out and separate the evil and the righteous and
8 throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be
9 weeping and gnashing of teeth."

10 And some people like to look at that and they more
11 or less rub their hands in glee. Finally they are going to
12 get theirs.

13 The point of the Gospel is, thanks to be God, you
14 are not going to get yours.

15 Because, you see, we have one who stands in for us.
16 We have one who has gone to the cross for us.

17 Jesus not only judges us, but he stands in for us.
18 He works both sides of the judge's bench.

19 It's not what you know, but who you know that
20 matters.

21 Let's pray for a moment. Would you join me,
22 please?

23 Thanks, gracious God, that we are in your net.

24 It's kind of a scary place to be. It's not full yet. There
25 is room for more.

1 And so we want to be effective fishermen and
2 fisherwomen for people.

3 So, Lord, give us some courage as we go from this
4 place to make a difference in this world by fishing, by
5 being there for people, by choosing a good attitude, by
6 having some fun, by making someone's day.

7 Lord, we thank you for making our day, for standing
8 in for us, for blessing us with grace and love. In the name
9 of Christ.

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