

Osaka International Church

**Matthew 4:19 – “Gone Fishing?”**

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Good morning everyone! Long time no see!

It's a real blessing to be back.

It was exactly six years ago, this next Tuesday, July 19th, 2010, when my wife, Amy, and I arrived in Osaka.

I will always remember the date because it was my birthday.

Just a few days later, I officially began to serve as an assistant pastor here at OIC where we were lovingly adopted into the family from the very start. Crazy how fast time flies!

Let's open with a word of prayer.

Father,

We thank You for this fellowship and the opportunity You have given us to praise Your Holy name together once again. Please, open our hearts and speak to us as we study Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen!

I would like to begin this morning by sharing an interesting Bible fact that I think might surprise you.

Did you know that Jesus never told unbelievers to go to church?

He never stood out in the crowd and said, "Hey you bunch of sinners, you better go to church!"

No, Jesus never told anyone lost in this world to go to church.

But....

He did tell His church to go to the world.

Notice...

**Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

As you know, we call this the Great Commission.

Now what if I said, "today we are going to do something different."

Jesus said to go, so "Ikimashou! "Let's go!"

Let's all stand up, go outside and begin to share the gospel with every single person we see."

How would you feel about that?

Would you be excited about that?

Or would you, all of a sudden, remember you had something at home you had to go take care of?

Would this cause fear?

Doubt?

Anxiety?

I wouldn't doubt that it would for many of us.

But why?

Isn't this what Jesus said to do?

He promised to be with us. So what's the problem?

Our flesh is the problem!

As Jesus had said...

**Matthew 26:41b** "...The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus says, "Go!" But our flesh says, "No!"  
Jesus' Great commission + our great weakness = a great problem!  
But Jesus is, of course, the great problem solver!  
So in Acts 1:8 He gives us the great solution.

Notice....

**Acts 1:8** "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In other words, Jesus is saying, "Have no fear! The Holy Spirit is here!"  
The empowering of the Holy Spirit is Jesus' great solution to our great weakness.

Therefore,  
"...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. **Mark 16:15b-16**

Okay... but how? How are we to be witnesses? How are we to share the Gospel?  
Notice what Jesus said to Peter and his brother Andrew when he called them to be His disciples.

**Matthew 4:19** "Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

What is the point, or purpose, or goal of being a fisher of men?  
To catch men!  
Notice the process...

1st, Jesus said, "Follow me!"

This is a call to discipleship.

2nd, Jesus said that He "will make."

The purpose of discipleship is not just to learn how to fish but "become" fishers of men!  
If someone calls himself a fisherman and never goes fishing is he really a fisherman?  
What makes someone a fisherman?  
The know how or the action?

The action!

The know how only makes you better at it.  
When Jesus says, "Follow Me!"  
How do we respond?

Do we say, "Ok!"

Do we say, "No way!"

Or do we hesitantly say, "That depends. Where are You going?"

Jesus said...

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." **John 14:2-3**

Okay, so heaven is ultimately where we will be if we follow Jesus.

Sounds great!  
So what are we supposed to do while we wait?

Go fishing!

Eh... But I don't like fishing, Joseph!

I totally understand.

When I was a kid I hated fishing!

I would have to get up very early while it was still dark.

I would have to go to some distant lake somewhere far from my cartoons on TV.

I would have to carry all kinds of gear down to the water.

I would sometimes have to wait for hours and hours before I'd get a bite.

I would have to do all these things I didn't want to do!

Normally I would get bored after the first 15 minutes and was off looking for crabs, or bugs, or anything else that would catch my attention.

I figured if I caught something it would be there waiting for me when I got back.

Today I believe it is much faster and cheaper to buy a fish at Kansai Super than to go and try to catch one! But you see the problem is we can't go to Kansai Super and purchase someone's salvation, can we?

No, we can't!

Now of course there are those who love to fish.

They enjoy the challenge.

The rewards, to them, that come from catching a fish are well worth any sacrifice they have to make.

Hey Joseph that's great for them, but I personally just don't like going fishing!

That's fair. But may I ask, how many times have you actually gone fishing?

Statistics tell us that 90-95% of professing Christians have never shared the Gospel to anyone.

So if you are one of these statistics, how do you know you don't like fishing if you have never even tried?

Now for those of you who have gone fishing, but still say you don't like it, I would then ask, what type of fishing did you try?

Perhaps there is another method of fishing you may like?

As I mentioned... I hated "lake" fishing when I was a kid.

It was so boring!

But when I was around 34 years old, a friend took me deep sea fishing and I loved it!

I sat there for hours and didn't catch a thing and I still loved every minute of it!

And then at last... I got a bite!

And I struggled to pull up a baby mako shark!

It was so cool and I would love to go again someday.

My point is that there will always be many methods of fishing but the principle will always be the same.

And the principle is this... we are either fishers of men or we are not.

If we never try to catch any fish... then we simply won't!

And if we never catch a fish, then we will never really know on what we are missing out.

If you don't like certain methods of fishing, then I would challenge you to pray that God would either change your heart or put on your heart a new method that you might enjoy trying.

Think about it like this....

What do you suppose the point is of someone going to school to learn "a language" or "Medicine" or "Mechanics" or "anything else" if that person has ZERO intentions of ever applying to their life what they have learned "in class"?

In the same way, as disciples of Jesus we are not "just" to continually learn week after week...

But we are to apply what we learn to our life.

And that is why James said,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” **James 1:22**

So are you ready to go fishing?

Are you ready to share the Gospel to your family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or even a total stranger if the Spirit led you?

If so, what would you tell them?

Would you say, “Hey, God loves you!”

“Hey thanks! Exactly which one of the 8 million Shinto gods here in Japan are you talking about?”

“Or is it one of the 330 million gods in Hinduism?”

We need to be a little more specific folks.

That is why we are to share the Gospel.

What exactly is the gospel?

Paul defines it for us in ...

**1Corinthians 15:1-4** ¶ Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

Christ died for our sins , He was buried, and then He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

According to verses 1 and 2 here, this is the Gospel “by which also you are saved!”

If I were a pentecostal preacher I would say, “If you believe it, give me an Amen!”

But if we can agree, then why do so many Christians find it so hard to share it? Especially here in Japan.

Dr. Minoru Okuyama, was a former Buddhist and a Shintoist who later on in life became a Christian and the director of the Missionary Training Center in Japan.

When addressing why he believed there were so few Christians in Japan he said this, and I quote,

*“Japanese people value human relationships more than truth and principle.”*

He went on to say,

*“Consequently we can say that as for Japanese, one of the most important things is harmony; in Japanese ‘Wa.’”*

Is this true?

Have you ever been in a situation where if you told the truth, someone might not like it?

Someone might get offended?

I am sure we all have.

And because of these fears, many of us refrain from speaking the truth sometimes, don't we?

Sometimes truth isn't always the most important thing to some people.

Sometimes tradition, cultural norms, and social expectations can take priority, even over truth.

In many cases, maintaining harmony between relationships has a higher priority than the Truth!

And people will often sacrifice what they know to be true for the sake of maintaining the peace and the harmony of a relationship.

What does the Japanese proverb say?

“The nail that sticks up.... get's pounded down!”

But think about that analogy of the nail...

Which is freer?

The nail that has been pounded down and forced to conform?

Or the nail that sticks up for what it believes to be true?

Jesus said,

**John 8:32** “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Free from what?

Free from our sin!

Free from the loneliness and the emptiness in our hearts!

Free to believe, no matter what others may say, that God loves us and is with us and has a plan and purpose for our lives!

In regards to sharing the Truth of the Gospel, Paul the Apostle proclaimed,

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” **(Why not Paul?)** “for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” **Romans 1:16a**

Can we say the same?

Let me give you one more statistic.

In 2014, at least 25,000 people in Japan committed suicide.

That is an average of around 70 suicides every single day for an entire year.

People are losing hope in family, in friends, in society, in culture, in religion, in their very selves every single day here in Japan and are giving up on life itself!

When we share the hope we have in the Lord with people in hopeless situations, how do they react?

“Hey thanks, but seriously how do you expect me to find hope in your faith that I don’t believe in?”

Well to that person I would say, “Do you have any better options?”

Seriously, in your time of desperation, when all hope has been lost, what better option is there?

Suicide? Suicide isn’t an option for those who want to survive!

But you see, how can Jesus be considered an option if they have never even heard the gospel?

In our little fellowship we have had 3 families lose immediate family members to suicide within a 10-month span.

Two mothers lost their sons, and one brother lost his sister.

We only have around 30 people on average at our church. So that’s, at least, 10% of our fellowship in less than a year (that I know of).

As you know, suicide is a shameful thing in this society that most families don’t like to share.

So for all I know, that percentage could be even higher.

Especially, if we added cousins and uncles and friends. I am sure it would go way up.

You may have heard of what has been called as “The ‘miracle of Kamaishi (釜石)”

It is the story of how 3,000 students survived the tsunami of March 2011 (let me read this for you).

Several years before the Tsunami, Professor Toshitaka Katada interviewed children from the Miyagi Prefecture that had been affected by two major earthquakes and tsunami in the past century.

He was shocked to hear the children say, without hesitation, that they wouldn’t evacuate if another earthquake hit the region because the adults in their families wouldn’t.

He commented, “Children look at the grown-ups and do what they do.”

So Professor Katada realized that if those children lost their lives to a tsunami, the fault would lie with, not just the parents, but all of Japan as a society.

He said, "I knew I had to do something so the children can save their own lives!"

So Katada began to encourage children to take the initiative in any evacuation.

He commented, "In general, people don't evacuate even though they know they should. It's natural to be reluctant to escape when no one else is escaping.

So he told the students, "you must be brave and be the **first** ones to evacuate. If you do, others will follow you and you can save their lives, too."

And that is exactly what happened!

Immediately after the 9.0 earthquake struck that afternoon, the students of Kamaishi East Junior High School ran out of the school to higher ground.

Their quick response prompted the children and teachers of the neighboring Unosumai Elementary School to follow, and consequently drew in many local residents.

As they continued to run, older students supported the younger school children, and together they reached a safe location while behind them, the mega-tsunami swallowed their schools and the town.

In the same way, "we must be brave and be the **first** ones to evacuate from family, culture, social, and/or religious bonds that will endanger our eternal salvation.

If each one of us takes our own responsibility for our own life, then there will be the possibility for others to be saved as well.

I remember when I had just barely become a Christian, I attended my grandfather's funeral.

Standing there next to me was my little sister, Tina, who wasn't a Christian.

As we were looking down at my grandfather's grave she said, "That's it! That's where we are going to end up!" At that point I quickly replied, "that may be where you are going to end up, but not me ,sister! I am going to be in Heaven!"

Just as Jesus promised...

**John 11:26** "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Well, I believe it! And around three months after sharing with my little sister, she became a Christian, along with my older sister and my mother.

In other words, I went fishing!

I was a baby Christian, barely a month old in the Lord and I went fishing.

If you haven't gone fishing yet, you need to understand something, those fish that mean the most to you aren't promised to be there tomorrow.

Go fishing, share the truth in love, before it's too late.

Lets pray!

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for Your gracious love and forgiveness upon us. We realize there are people You have placed in our life that do not know You. We understand they are not promised another day, nor are we. So we pray You would soften their hearts to receive Your love and, if it is Your will, prepare our heart to help do it. We realize that apart from Your Son we can do nothing. Without Your Holy Spirit we have no power. So we cry out to You in surrender, have Your will, have Your way in our lives today. It is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.