

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

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Grace to you, and peace, from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Pastor Steve Hansen.

Let me tell you a story. Like many young people who grew up in the church, I treated confirmation as graduation. The reason for that was because I didn't really understand at that age what the pastor was teaching, and because of that, I felt like an outsider, whereas I felt the kids around me knew everything there was to be known.

My younger brother, however, was much more steady than I. He continued going to church after confirmation several years later, when I was home during my first year of college. At my first Christmas break, my brother invited me to attend a dinner at church to welcome the new pastor. I accepted, and that decision changed the course of my life.

When I met Pastor Steve, he did something my brother had done: he invited this older prodigal sibling back to church. By Easter, he had me do the unthinkable: preach at the early sunrise service for Easter itself.

Now, I tell you this because I suspect my experience is not unique. Many people leave the church, or stand at its fringes, and the only thing, *the only thing* that could potentially change that is personal invitation. Personal invitation. That said, we as Lutherans, especially, resist the idea, failing to do what Jesus says in today's Gospel, namely, to be "fishers of men," or more inclusively, to be catchers of people.

And we have good reason for our reluctance. As the ELCA pastor Rob Moss observes in a blog post on the subject, “The fact is that you (referring to pastors) can encourage, threaten, explain, and even manipulate all you want, but if people aren’t motivated to invite others, it pretty much isn’t going to happen, especially when it comes to church. Because, let’s face it, we’ve done a poor job of making the church a desirable, much less helpful, community of which to be a part. My congregational folks know it, and so do yours. That’s why they rarely invite. Isn’t there a statistic somewhere that says, “the average mainline Protestant Christian – Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist – invites someone to worship *once every 14 years*.”

There are reasons for that. Yes, our folks are happy to welcome new people if they happen to show up at church, but most people in our congregations, and, I’m sad to say, some of their pastors, just aren’t motivated enough to invite others.

Why is it so hard to invite others to church? Moss responds the following way: “Let’s face it,” he writes, “change is hard and change can be frightening. Is it any wonder then that we generally resist stepping way outside our comfort zones and established patterns of behavior to invite a friend to come to worship? This is terrifying.” He says, “We are all afraid, A, that our friend will laugh us out of the room; B, that they will tell all their friends that we are narrow minded, judgmental, hypocritical bible thumpers; or C, that they might actually come!” *Then what? Then what?*

My response is that just because it’s hard doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try it. This is why Pastor Moss feels we need to stop simply being a *welcoming* church, which we’re really good at, I think, and become also an *inviting* church. The big question, then, is, how do we do that? How do we transition from being only a welcoming church to become an inviting church?

For his part, Moss suggests five small steps for those of us who are reticent or find it difficult to invite other people to church. I would like to highlight simply the first three. So listen closely.

Number one, you can start by simply using the phrase “my church” in conversation with someone this week and each week for a month. “My church.” For example: “I can’t watch the Super Bowl today because I’ve already made plans to attend worship at *my church*.”

Or another example: “Have you ever been to Macrina Bakery? It’s just two blocks from my church.” Or “I love listening to classical music on King FM. It reminds me of the music at my church.”

Now, the first step is easy – again, simply incorporate the words “my church” in one conversation this week you’re having with someone else. The second step is a little harder, but I think it’s doable, especially when it comes to the transition we should be making from being only a welcoming church to an inviting church.

“Consider,” Moss says, “a word or phrase that describes our church well.” A word or phrase that describes our church well. In other words, instead of just saying “my church,” you say “my church is” ____

Now, why is this important? Sometimes I hear people at Queen Anne Lutheran say, “we have to grow our church. We have to fill the pews.” Whenever I hear that, I find myself asking, “Why? Why should we fill our church? Why should we grow it? Why should we invite people?”

One of the quickest ways to answer this question is by again, using a word or phrase in conversation with someone that describes our church. You can do this by filling in the blank. “My church is ____”

Let me give you a few more examples. “School violence? My church is hosting a forum about that next month.” Or, “You like classical music too? My church is having a violin concert next week.” Or, “You know of ‘The Rebellion against the Empire’? My church is watching the original Star Wars as part of a series for Faith and Film.”

Okay, I’ve talked about a couple small steps we can take, to stop simply being a welcoming church and start becoming an inviting church as well.

To summarize: Use the phrase “My church” in a sentence once this week with a friend or someone else you meet.

Two: Use the phrase “My church is ____” That is, provide a description, in conversation with a friend or someone else you meet.

I’d like to conclude now with the third step, by asking you to name one thing our congregation not is, but *does* well. What’s one thing, at Queen Anne Lutheran Church, we do well?

“Reach out.”

Excellent. So “Queen Anne Lutheran Church,” or “My church is really good at reaching out.” Reaching out. I love that. What else?

Quilting? All right, “My church is really good at quilting.” That’s not so hard!

Or again, from Carol Ann, “My church has great *educational forum programming.*”

So we’re looking at what my church, or what our church, does really well.

So here – you say this sentence and complete it as follows.

“My church is really good at reaching out.”

“My church is really good at education.”

“My church is really good at music.”

“My church is really good at, as we heard today in the forum, being inclusive.”

Now in my next article for *The Quill*, our monthly newsletter, I’m going to discuss steps four and five, if you really want a challenge. My point today, however, is simple. Jesus calls us to be fishers of men, or catchers of people. He calls us to invite others out of isolation and into fellowship. Had Pastor Steve Hansen not done that for me, along

with my brother, I wouldn't be here speaking with you now, my life would be different, and frankly, I think it would be the worst for it.

Invitation is everything. And the good news is that if you are a reluctant Lutheran (or Lutheran sympathizer), you are not alone. Jesus accompanies you, and sometimes even meets you, in the face of the person you invite into fellowship, in the face of the person to whom you reach out.

So this week, I invite you to take one small step with Dan and one giant leap for Dan's kind by doing at least one thing. Use the phrase "my church" in conversation with someone else, or use the phrase that describes our church well, "My church is ____" or, if you're really brave, think about what our church *does* well and use that to finish the phrase, "My church is really good at ____"

This way, together, we can start becoming the Inviting Church that Jesus calls us to be in our Gospel reading for today.

Amen.