

THE INVITATION

January 22, 2012

Jesus said to them, “*Follow me, follow me and I will make you fish for people.*”

In the world of manufacturing and marketing, few things are as golden as that magical moment when the brand name of your merchandise becomes synonymous with the item itself. So, come with me for a moment on a little household tour. I’ll say the brand name...you tell me in response what the item is:

Frigidaire – refrigerator

Kleenex – facial tissue

Maytag – washing machine

Coke – cola

Waring – blender

Tabasco – hot sauce (sounds like you all use it)

Nesco – electric roaster

Hellman’s – mayonnaise

Hoover – vacuum cleaner

Vacuum cleaner. Right! ***Hoover*** is a vacuum cleaner. There’s a slogan that goes along with those ***Hoover*** vacuum cleaners. Maybe you’ve heard it. ***There’s nothing like a Hoover when you’re dealing with dirt!***

My mom owned a ***Hoover***...and I loved it! It was a huge, metal monster – different from the Hoovers we buy today. Every Thursday, Mom muscled it across the carpet. And, as soon as I was old enough to walk, I “helped”. I held on to the handle with every stroke. Mom was frustrated, but the ***Hoover*** still did its job. And she was convinced, absolutely convinced, that it was the best vacuum cleaner there could ever be. After all, it was a ***Hoover!***

Then, one day, there was a knock on the door. Now those were the days of traveling salesmen, but the person who knocked wasn’t the ***Fuller Brush*** man, or the ***Amway*** representative or the ***Avon*** lady. Was it the ***Electrolux*** salesman? No, it was the ***Kirby*** salesman. Absolutely!

Now, my mother was really pretty good at keeping these traveling salesmen outside of the front door, but this guy was a master. He was seductive! And he got inside! He told us that what he was offering for sale was the best vacuum cleaner that had ever been designed or manufactured. And so he proceeded – after he had brought his equipment in – to take a bag, and open it, and dump a pile of dirt on the carpet. And then he asked for our ***Hoover***, and he vacuumed it up. And then he got out his ***Kirby***, and he put a piece of white filter paper where the bag was supposed to go, and he ran that ***Kirby*** over the same spot. And then he showed us the filter paper, and you know what color it now was. It was black with dirt. Our ***Hoover*** rumbled when it ran, but that ***Kirby*** roared like a jet engine. He explained to us that it had an adjustable height for all kinds of carpets and that, unlike the ***Hoover*** it did not have a beater bar that wore out your carpets. Rather, it just had gentle brushes to clean your floors. Then he told us that this ***Kirby*** vacuum cleaner...this wonder of modern machinery...wasn’t just a vacuum cleaner. It was a ***Home Care System!*** It could polish floors...it could shampoo carpets...it could sharpen lawnmower blades...it could wax your car...and it could vaporize moth crystals and fumigate your closets!

It was a *Home Care System*, and Mom wasn't just sold...she was converted! The *Hoover* was history. She traded it in on the spot for a brand-new, shiny, *Kirby Home Care System*. Yes, she bought one...and then Grandma bought one...and then the next door neighbor bought one: all because that traveling salesman came knocking at our door one day.

Now, you know, the price was astronomical: six hundred dollars in 1961! Six hundred dollars! It was astronomical, but, oh, it was worth it. Oh, yes, it was worth it. Absolutely it was worth it. Here it is: fifty years old and as good as the day it was bought. It was worth it, absolutely worth it. Oh...did I tell you about the quick release cord? Look at that! Listen to that! Mike will be amazed at how clean this carpet is. There it is: the *Kirby Home Care System*...fifty years old. That day, for my family, the name for vacuum cleaner changed. It wasn't *Hoover* anymore; it was *Kirby*.

That *Kirby* salesman was a pied piper: he had a seductive pitch and a superior product and, with that kind of a combination, who could resist? A *Hoover* is a vacuum cleaner...but a *Kirby*; you know, it's a *Home Care System*!

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Now the shore of the Sea of Galilee isn't quite like the neighborhoods of the American heartland...and professional fishermen aren't beset by the same frustrations that face Midwestern housewives...but both were fertile fields for a charismatic charmer. And Jesus was certainly that:

“Follow me, he said. Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Now, folks, you have to understand that Jesus really didn't know anything about fishing. After all, Jesus was a carpenter. He wasn't a fisherman; He was a carpenter. He apprenticed with Joseph, his father. And I suspect in that way he was just like the Kirby salesman who probably didn't keep house. But they both knew – that *Kirby* salesman and Jesus – they both knew that they had to connect with people where they are. So the *Kirby* salesman pitched caring for the home to housewives, and Jesus pitched a new way to fish to fishermen.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Now those four fishermen – Andrew and Simon and John and James – didn't have a clue about what that really meant...and they didn't have any guarantee about where Jesus was going to take them...and they didn't know how they were going to make a living. But, oh, that sales pitch that Jesus offered them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee was inviting...and it was enticing...and it sounded exciting, so they did it! They did it! They left their nets, and their boats, and even their fresh catch lying on the beach. They abandoned family and the family business, and they followed Jesus.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Now God's message to Jonah wasn't nearly as beguiling as was Jesus' invitation to those four fishermen. Instead, God got right to the point with Jonah. He gave Jonah a direct command. He said: *Go to Nineveh!*

But that was the last place Jonah wanted to go. You see, Nineveh was Sin City! Nineveh was filled with gratuitous violence, and obscene wealth, and desperate poverty. Besides that, Nineveh was a foreign city. It belonged to Assyria, not Israel. And, for that reason, Jonah simply couldn't understand why God would care about that place. But God did, and God was insistent, and God was persistent, and God said to Jonah: ***Go to Nineveh and preach my judgment there.***

So, Jonah went. He tried not to go, but a big fish got in his way. So Jonah went because he had no choice. And when he did, the people of Nineveh responded, and they repented, and they put on sack cloth. And God forgave the people of Nineveh. God changed His mind about destroying their city. And Jonah was furious because at least he thought that if he had to go to Nineveh he would get to see a great display of God's wrath. But even that fell through.

Jonah was a reluctant fisherman. He was a fisherman who got caught by a fish. And then, because he had no choice, he went fishing for people and he caught a whole city full, a whole city full for God.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Here, friends, is the secret of salvation: Jonah learned it and Jesus knew it. And the secret is this: ***Meet people where they are!*** To fisherman, what's the invitation? Follow me and I'll make you fish for people. To teachers...listen to me and I'll give you the lesson of a lifetime, the lesson of mercy. To entrepreneurs...let me show you how to operate the business of humanization. To lawyers...let me teach you the law of love. To physicians...here is how to heal body and spirit. To laborers...let me show you the work of justice. And to farmers...I will teach you how to sow the seeds and reap the harvest of peace. Meet people where they are. Speak the language they know best...but don't leave them there! No matter ***who*** we are, Jesus meets us ***where*** we are, and makes us part of God's reclamation project for a sin-sick world.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

That's the invitation...that's Jesus' invitation. But, you know, invitations are risky business. When God worked with Jonah, God knew that. So God used a command, not an invitation...and then a storm...and then a very hungry fish to convince Jonah that God's way was the right way.

But Jesus insists on our freedom to answer. And our answer isn't just about the invitation. It's about the inviter. It's about the salesman. It's about the pied piper. That ***Kirby*** salesman: well, he made a profit for himself. But Jesus: well, He was a prophet of God's love...for us.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

The invitation is not about what we're doing or where we're going. The invitation is about who we're trusting and who we're going with. The invitation is to open our hearts and our lives so that Jesus can be our Master...and our Savior...and our Lord...and our Friend. The invitation is to follow Jesus even when it's not easy, or popular, or convenient. The invitation is to give our minds, and our hearts, and our hands, and our hopes, and our dreams, and even our destinies to the love and the life of our Lord.

Each Sunday we have been beginning our worship with the Bond of Union. It is the covenant that has bound this church together for a hundred and thirteen years. It's historic. But, you know, there is a sense in the Bond of Union...a sense that we hold Jesus at an intellectual arms' length distance. You know how it goes.

We accept the religion of love and service which Jesus lived and taught and declare it our purpose to strive to do the will of God and to make the Christ Spirit dominant in our lives and in all human relations.

Maybe more simply and more directly we might say what it is that Jesus invites from us: ***We will follow Jesus!*** No intellectual arms' length there, just a simple response to an irresistible invitation. ***We will follow Jesus!*** Can you say it? ***We will follow Jesus!*** That means that we will trust Him, and we will love Him, and we will serve Him...every day! ***We will follow Jesus!*** In the language of the church, friends, that's what it means to be a disciple. And, just like Simon and Andrew, and James and John, disciples are what we are called to be.

“Follow me! Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

More than fifty years ago, a traveling salesman knocked at our door and changed my family. The vacuum cleaner that had been ***Hoover*** for us became ***Kirby***. Today, a traveling salesman from Galilee is knocking at our doors. He can change you. If He does, then instead of defining our lives in terms of profession, or occupation, or possession, or recreation; life for us will be Jesus. Life will be following Him.

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

That's not just an invitation for ancient fisherman. That is our invitation today. Here's how they answered: ***And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*** The question is: ***How will we answer?*** Amen.

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 January 22, 2012