



A weekly Bible study/discussion for youth, linking a current news story and scripture texts
A resource of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

January 21-28, 2009

Something fishy about “sea kittens”

Warm-up Question:

What’s the strangest name you’ve ever heard for a pet?

There’s a new creature swimming in our rivers, lakes, and oceans. Well, sort of. The folks at PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have launched a campaign to rename fish “sea kittens.” The strategy is one of several attempts by PETA to discourage people from eating certain kinds of meat. Past projects included referring to

McDonald’s and Burger King as “McCruelty” and “Murder King,” and the 2003 “Holocaust on Your Plate” slogan, which compared some farming practices to tactics employed by the Nazis in World War II.

PETA launched the Sea Kittens page on its Web site (www.peta.org) with the intent to appeal to children and their parents. The friendly animated characters link to interactive pages where users can create their own sea kitten, read sea kitten stories, and sign a petition. The term “fishing” is replaced with “sea kitten hunting.” Fish are portrayed as intelligent, adorable, and as experiencing emotions of pain and loss.

The Sea Kitten campaign hopes to create awareness about brutal fishing practices. PETA also wants to discourage people from eating fish in general. The petition, which has over 5,000 signatures, asks the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to “stop allowing our little sea kitten friends to be tortured and killed. Who’d want to hurt a sea kitten anyway?!” The site goes on to declare, “The promotion of sea kitten hunting is a glaring contradiction of FWS (Fish and Wildlife Service) mission to ‘conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats.’”

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the “Sea Kitten” campaign?
2. What are some ethical ways of fishing? How about unethical ways of fishing? Would you sign a petition that asks the FWS to “stop promotion of fishing?” Explain your position.
3. As stewards of God’s creation, what stance do you believe Christians should take on this issue?
4. How does changing the name or identity of something alter your opinion, understanding, or view of an issue? (e.g., Sea kitten instead of fish, conflict instead of war, online advertisement instead of spam, hate crime instead of freedom of expression,

protective coating engineer instead of painter, etc. Think of some others.)

🕒 Scripture Texts (NRSV) for Sunday, January 25, 2009.

(Text links are to [oremus Bible Browser](#). Oremus Bible Browser is not affiliated with or supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. You can find the calendar of readings for *Year B* at [Lectionary Readings](#).)

[Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)

[Psalm 62:5-12 \(6\)](#)

[1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)

[Mark 1:14-20](#)

🕒 For lectionary humor and insight, check the weekly comic [Agnus Day](#).

🕒 Gospel Reflection

Mark seems like the kind of guy who would rather study Cliff's Notes (an abbreviated overview) than read an entire book. His Gospel is short and to the point. The first chapter (45 verses) tells of John the Baptist's ministry, the baptism of Jesus, the temptation of Jesus, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the calling of the disciples, Jesus teaching in the synagogue, removing demons, cleansing lepers, and even Jesus' first preaching tour. So much for beating around the bush!

The gospel text for today tells of how Jesus called his first disciples -- Simon and Andrew; James and John. Two sets of brothers. All were fishermen. This is significant for many reasons, not the least of which was the social standing of fishermen. People who caught fish served an important purpose in society, as they provided one of the major food resources for the community. However, fishermen had very little connection with most people, other than their fellow fishers. They kept to themselves. They were dirty and smelly. Many fishermen had no home -- they just lived in their boats. They were rough-and-tumble, salt-of-the-earth kinds of people, certainly not the kinds of people that would be thought of as religious leaders!

Yet these were exactly the kinds of people that Jesus wanted to have around.

Jesus called these two sets of brothers to help him show the world that God is a God for everyone; not just the educated, wealthy, religious folk. He turned the word "fishermen" around into "fishers of men" (which we know includes ALL people, not just men). Imagine the confusion that Simon, Andrew, James, and John were experiencing. Not only were they leaving behind the familiar life of fishermen, but they were now going to have to fish for people. This is just the beginning though. Jesus would lead these men on a three-year journey where everything was turned upside-down. Swords would be turned into ploughshares, rough places made plain, lowly are exalted, sick made healthy, and dead were raised to new life.

Though these young men were the same people, they had a new identity. There were no longer fishers of fish, they were fishers of people. In the same way, Jesus changes our identity from "lost, broken, sinner" to "child of God." It's amazing how one little name change can make a huge difference in our lives and view of the world.

Discussion Questions

1. What would you say if a strange man showed up at your school and said, "follow me,

- and I will teach you to fish for people?”
2. Why do you think Jesus chose fishermen to be his first disciples? Why not highly educated, publicly recognized religious leaders?
 3. How does changing the identity of the chosen disciples (from fishermen to fishers of people) change the way they viewed themselves?
 4. Whether they're called “fish” or “sea kittens,” the animal is the same. Whether these men were called “fishermen” or “fishers of people,” they were still the same men. All that changed was other people's perceptions of them. What kinds of labels do you put on other people? How do those labels impact the way you treat them, respect them, or trust them? How would you treat people if you gave them all the same label, “child of God?”

🕒Activity Suggestions

Fishing for people is not about sticking a hook in their mouth and dragging them into your boat (the church). It's also not about sitting in the “boat” and hoping fish will just magically jump into it. Being a fisher of people means two things:

1. engaging
2. inviting

Ask everyone to think of one or two people they would like to go fishing for this week. Give each person some construction paper, marker, and a pair of scissors. Have everyone cut out a fish and write the name(s) of the people they want to go fishing for during the upcoming week. Talk about ways to engage these people in conversation about Jesus. Share ideas for how and when to invite them to your church. Encourage everyone to keep their little fish cut-out in their planner to remind them to go fishing for people.

🕒Closing Prayer

God, you have given us a new identity as your children. Help us to trust in your promises, and to share them with others. Amen.

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