



Out of the fishbowl and into the harbor (Luke 14:25-33)

Did any of you see the movie "Finding Nemo?" If you didn't see it, I invite you to rent it and watch it. The movie opens as Coral and Marlin, a happily married pair of Clownfish carefully stand watch over their soon to hatch clutch of eggs. Suddenly a barracuda appears and in an instant, Coral and the bulk of the eggs are gone. And only the heartbroken Marlin and a single damaged, unhatched egg remains that hatches and becomes Marlin's son Nemo.

Such is life on the beautiful but brutal great barrier reef off the coast of Australia. Which is how Marlin ends up being such an overly protective parent to the curious and adventuring Nemo, who has a damaged fin as a result of the barracuda attack. Marlin overprotects Nemo and embarrasses him in front of his friends like overprotective parents do, which causes Nemo to think he must do something outrageous to show how brave he is. So Nemo swims up and touches a very forbidden fishing boat. Marlin, of course freaks out. So Nemo does it again (like kids do...) Unfortunately scuba divers are swimming near the boat and one catches him in a net and takes him to Sydney where he winds up a prisoner in a dentist office aquarium.

In the aquarium in Sydney, Nemo is surrounded by colorful fish characters. Gill, Bloat, Bubbles, and Peach the starfish who has become a dental expert from all her time watching dental procedures in the aquarium. All would be well, except the fish know that the dentist has a niece named Darla, who he wants to give some of the fish, including Nemo to. Unfortunately, Darla is very rough on her pets. She reportedly torments them and pecks on the aquarium and even sometimes shakes them to death, which is why the fish decide they must find a way to escape their aquarium prison before the dentist gives them away to Darla.

The fish hatch a plan of deliberately making the fish tank as dirty as possible, which will force the dentist to clean it and put them in plastic bags on a shelf by a window that overlooks Sydney harbor. Once on the shelf they plan to create a distraction so they can hop in their little plastic bags over to the harbor to freedom.

Now of course, the plan gets foiled, but the good news is that Nemo and his friends improvise and do end up back in the harbor. (I'll let you see the movie to see how...) I was reminded of this story from Finding Nemo this morning because I believe we at FCC San Lorenzo have been called to clean up our fishbowl and then move from the glass fishbowl we have created here back into the harbor of the community around us. This movement will require an unfolding plan that will seem hair-brained to some and will require improvisation at times. This movement will also require a deep commitment to discipleship that is spelled out in our scripture reading this morning. Lets take take a closer look...

The crowd in Luke's gospel has assembled around Jesus because they have seen him best the scribes and Pharisees in arguments. They have seen him heal numerous



people, including the man with dropsy in last week's scripture reading. Jesus is a winner in their eyes, and they believe they are following a winner, maybe even to Jerusalem and to the crown of the new messiah. But Jesus teaches here with a flair for the dramatic with talk about disregarding family and parents that sounds very little like the family values rhetoric he is attributed with today, that being his disciple carries a high pricetag. He wants to make it clear he is headed to a cross, not a crown and Discipleship is not a joyride. It will require the commitment of our lives.

Now in this day and age when people shop churches like we shop stores in the mall to find the one that "fits" us and has what WE need. It is less popular to talk about the demands and costs of discipleship. And yet, in recent months, we have talked at length about the demands of discipleship, about Jesus calls us to live authentically and make our actions and words match up. We have talked about the need that we be in conversation with God constantly, in prayer and in discernment about his will for us.

We have talked about the need for forgiveness and letting go that keeps the stream clear and the streams of living water flowing. We have talked about our call to use scripture in life giving ways rather than in abusive limiting ways that are just attempts to justify our own positions and levels of comfort. All of these calls to Discipleship are difficult. Living authentically is particularly a hard thing to do. Its like "loving neighbor as self..." there is no way we are going to do it perfectly, which ironically should remind us of our own need for forgiveness, which should remind us of the need to forgive others and so on which keeps us humble and keeps that water of grace clean and flowing.

These calls to Discipleship are part of Jesus' plan for us. And we need to attend to his plan for us, and let it grow into a plan for us As Jesus puts it, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" The fact that it is time to look at the plan that is growing out of this for our church will fill some of your hearts with joy. I think Glenys and Virginia, and some of the rest of you bottom line kind of folks will be pleased to hear that part of Jesus Christ's call to Discipleship is that we need a plan to build on. What is unfolding here at FCC San Lorenzo appears to be is a two part plan. The first part of the plan involves "cleaning up the water in the church fishbowl" the second involves "moving from the fishbowl back to the harbor."

The first part of the plan has to do with the way we live and treat each other, we have been talking about and living into the first part of the plan during my first 18 months here. We have been praying, forgiving, learning what it means to live authentically, and becoming a healthier congregation emotionally. We have been setting new boundaries, empowering new leaders, solidifying our identity as a welcoming congregation, and letting go of the past. Our emerging leaders are making it clear that there will be no more emotional hostage taking, and that gossip will be minimized. We are making progress with this first part of the plan. AND We have cleaned up our fishbowl. We are committed to not letting it get dirty again. The irony is that if we stay cut off from the community around us it will get dirty, and we will spin around in the bowl cut off from our call and mission to spread the gospel. So now it is time for us to move into part II of the



plan and take our newly cleaned up spruced up fishbowl out into the harbor of the community we find ourselves in and spread the good news.

Part II or "getting back into the harbor" involves a three pronged approach. For part II to work, the first prong of it is that Part I has to keep flowing and building and be managed with great care. The emotional health and clarity we are gaining over the last 18 months must not be compromised. Our sense of identity as a welcoming, healing, hospitable place where the love and good news of Jesus Christ is available to all must not waver. And we must continue to work of managing those who would sabotage this effort, and clarifying these issues and of forging new mission and vision statements that fit us in this present moment.

The second and third prongs in this plan are intertwined and involve moving the fishbowl back into the harbor of the community around us.

Now that our identity is more solidified and the bowl we are living in is clearer, it is time for us, over the next three years, to reach out and open our doors to our hearts and our church buildings and serve the community we are in (If we don't the bowl and water are going to tend to get dirty because we are not doing what a church is supposed to be doing according to the gospel of Jesus Christ). Prong two of this kind of community service will bring needed funds into our congregation that will decrease our deficit to a manageable level. Our newly elected trustees are working on this piece of the plan and will be meeting with the board this coming week to hone their ideas for renting unused rooms in our fellowship hall to community based non-profits that share our mission and for renting our fellowship hall and sanctuary to groups that benefit individuals and the community at large and support, not interfere with the ministry we are undertaking here. Already, our trustees are forging new relationships with our tenants. The trustees have met with the parent group at the school that rents our space and we have begun a new relationship with them, and with their new director, with clearer boundaries that will involve them more fully in the life of our church community through joint cleanup days and projects. These relationships will forge new ties with the community, with families, and children, and bring new life and money into our midst..

The third prong of this plan of Discipleship concerns the E-word; evangelism and it works in tandem with the other two. The bottom line is that our newly gained emotional clarity in prong one is going to attract new interest in what we are doing. We have seen some of that already. Churches with clarity and high standards of emotional stewardship attract people with clarity and high standards of emotional stewardship. Our commitment to live authentically and with integrity in the example of Jesus Christ will draw others with the same commitment. Our commitment to spreading the good news of welcome and abundant love of Jesus Christ will draw others seeking the same. As Jesus put it simply, "what we sow, we will also reap."

And now as a part of spreading the gospel, we are being called to tell our stories. To tell the story of our tradition, of our founders, of the good news of Jesus Christ. Telling your story of how God is working in your life is all it takes. You don't have to hand out tracts or thump a bible, or use scripture to convince people you have the best option. You



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don't have to be pushy or self righteous-those things will not work. But good Discipleship rooted in the example of Jesus Christ calls us to live authentically and to tell our stories of how God is at work in our lives. We will have the opportunity to learn more about this very thing in October when Nancy, our new student pastor, and I together will be leading a discussion group about this very thing.

I believe we have reached the tipping point. And the holy spirit has been revealing this plan to continue cleaning up the fishbowl and moving our energy back into the harbor for the last 18 months. I encourage each of you to pray in earnest. To discern how God is calling you to Discipleship, and to be a part of this plan. What are you being called to do? To pray, to forgive, to live authentically, to give, to paint, to sweep, to greet, to reach out, to teach, to lead, to prepare food, to keep the water in the bowl clean? Let's join hands and celebrate today as we begin our move toward the harbor together...