

LET'S GO FISHIN'

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Jesus Calls His First Disciples **LUKE 5:1-11**

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,^[a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who 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 from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began 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 full that they began to sink.⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

The passage we have just heard is quiet a fish story.

I don't think we have a lot of people in this congregation who really love to fish because I have not heard any fish stories likely. But I know many folks who do love to fish. My grandson Andrew is one of them. On all of our annual trips to the Lake of the Ozarks since he has been able to walk and hold a fishing pole he would rather have a fishing pole with a line dipped in the water than to eat. That is still the case today. He catches a fish, throws it back and thinks of the day he might catch it again when it is bigger. And he could tell a few fish stories of his own.

I have a fishing pole here this morning that was given to me by Marilyn O'Neill before she left for warmer places. She was kind enough to let the grandkids go to her house so they could legally fish in the lake behind her home. (You had to be a guest of a person who lived there to fish in the small lake.) I took Wilson and Megan over to fish one day while they were visiting and they really enjoyed the day but also recall when they laid down one pole to prepare another when all of a sudden a fish took off with the pole on the dock never to be recovered again.

But I have fished with those who intended to fish and catch to keep. Bill Norwood and I would go fishing on several occasions at the small Lake Chautauqua where we would fish for Crappie. They are small fish and it takes a lot of them to make a meal but they are delicious. When we would start fishing we would put water in one of the two five-gallon buckets we had with us and would fish until we had reached an agreed upon number and if we reached that point we were committed. We would put some ice into the bucket and plan to fish until we had both buckets of fish. We would then take them back to my house and clean them and put them in quart bags with a little water, freeze them, and then the day he planned to leave for home he would come and get them and place them in a lined freezer and fly back to Arizona with them. Then when Marilyn and I went to spend a few days with them Bill would cook up some of the fish of a fish fry. For me, the eating of the fish and the way he prepared them was much more fun than the catching themselves. Although it was always great to have conversations with Bill as we threw out the hook and waited to see who would be the next to reel in another fish.

I love fish stories. I have always thought it fun to hear folk talk about the fish they have caught or the

one who got away. All of us have heard fish stories of some kind or another during our lifetime. Some of them are very believable and others, well let's just say that the exaggeration is the best part of the story.

Fish stories aren't anything new. The disciples had a whopper of a fish story to tell. It was a true story, but just as some of you are probably doubting the truth of fish story stories you have heard, I would guess that many people when told of the day Jesus went fishing with Peter doubted the truth of what Peter and Andrew and James and John were telling them when they told this story of their day with Jesus on Lake Gennesaret.

Jesus comes up to the lake, and as usual, a crowd gathers. So, he gets into Peter's boat and tells Peter to put out just a little from shore. Jesus uses the boat as a pulpit and begins to teach the crowd. When the lesson was over he tells Peter to put out his nets on the other side of the boat from where Jesus was teaching. Peter puts up a short protest saying, *"We have been out here fishing all night long and haven't caught a blessed thing. We have come back in and cleaned up our nets and now you want us to put them back out again? Oh well, you want us to put out the nets, we'll put out the nets."* And Peter goes about doing what Jesus instructed him to do. He put out the nets. The Bible doesn't tell us what Peter was thinking as he put the nets into the water. I wouldn't be surprised if he was thinking, *"Here I am, a professional fisherman. I know how to catch fish; I've been doing it most of my life. I have worked all night and haven't caught anything. And now this itinerant carpenter/preacher presumes to tell me how to fish. Of all the nerve."* Now he may not have thought it, but it certainly would have been in line with Peter's character.

But it didn't stop there. Ever since the days of the disciples people have been sharing their fish stories. They have gone out and shared their faith. People have told others what God has done in their lives. And friends, God has done some mighty and powerful things in people's lives.

God has done some powerful things in the lives of people like us and people like us have gone out into the world to tell others what God has done.

From that time until now we have been gathering our own fish stories. We, like the disciples, have a story to tell a world that needs to know about the love of God and the lifesaving actions of Jesus Christ. God has done things in our lives and others need to know what those things are.

However, there is one part of this text for this morning that had stumped many people who have tried to explain it. That is verse 8. After they had explained that it would do no good to try again to catch fish, which Jesus had suggested to Peter that they ought to do. What does the statement of Peter, *"Depart from me for I am a sinful man,"* mean?

Perhaps Peter thought he had this whole fishing business figured out but when Jesus was able to show something to him about catching lots of fish Peter learned about himself from the one he called, *"Lord."* This was not the only time he would have to have this truth revealed. You remember it was to be revealed to him later in his journey with this one he called "Lord" when he would deny him. But on both occasions the Lord never left him when he told him to depart from him because he was a sinner.

Most of us have experienced a similar emotion.

We have thought that we were as good as we needed to be since we had not been shown different. Then we became aware of that life that was different than ours. For example, we see someone who rises in an emergency to reveal a moral courage that we had not even begun to think about. We saw him take upon himself unselfish burdens and help those who stumbled along in this earthly pilgrimage and help them up the hard hills. We saw him outlined on the hills as we watched from the valleys cultivating our own interests. Then for the first time we began to see ourselves for who we really were and we cried out, *"Depart from me for I am a sinful person."*

We knew that we had sinned not against a moral code, but against the real meaning of life which, now that we had seen it, we could no longer deny.

But, let me assure you that the Christ does not walk away. He seeks us. The disciples shared their stories. Will we share ours?

We often have excuses. *"Oh, but preacher, I am too busy to tell people about that."* We all lead busy

lives, that's why we have to work together if we are to accomplish God's work. Or *"Oh, but preacher, I don't know the Bible very well."* First of all, we won't know the Bible if we don't study it and second, I didn't say go out and tell people about the Bible, I said go tell them your fish story. Go tell them how God is working in your life. Or *"Oh, but preacher, I am afraid."* You don't think the disciples were afraid? Sure, they were. They walked away from what they knew to a new way of living. They had to trust.

The disciples walked away from the biggest catch they had ever seen. That was a big thing to do, but they did it. They trusted Jesus to guide them in the days ahead. We might be afraid of going out and sharing our fish stories, but we need to remember that God is with us. We need to share.

Peter admits (verse 5) that he and the other two disciples are failures at fishing. All night long they have labored with nothing to show for it. *"Nothing."* Jesus calls them after he shows them that he is a master fisherman. He succeeds where they fail. Yet then the story turns, upon Jesus's words, from Jesus's work to Jesus commissioning the disciples to do his work. Simon, even with his limitations, even as a sinful person, is commissioned to *"catch people"* (verse 10) not on the basis of who he is but rather on the basis of what Jesus is doing. Jesus intends to utilize even *"sinful people,"* in this instance, Simon and his friends in mission.

The scene is reminiscent of Isaiah's reaction upon seeing the Lord high and lifted up: *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty"* (Isaiah 6:5

Peter's experience is reminiscent of Isaiah's reaction upon seeing the Lord high and lifted up: *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty"* (Isaiah 6:5). Once Peter realized who Jesus really was—the true Son of God from heaven—he saw himself in a new light. To see God is to see ourselves as we really are. And sometimes the vision is too much for us to handle. Peter could not stand the contrast between the purity and power of Christ and his own sinfulness, so he begs Jesus to depart.

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah holds a similar theme for us as the one from Peter. In this instance Isaiah saw the righteous God at a time of worship. And he contrasted the Holy God with that of his sinful people and himself because he also was one of those people.

Many people wonder why the passage from Isaiah 6 that you heard read by Jessicah, did not come at the beginning of the book rather than in chapter 6. In my mind it is a similar reason as to why Jesus was calling his disciples at the time that he did. He was helping the disciples to see that he needed people who would go and tell others about God with Usin Christ. Jesus had seen the sinfulness that saw prevalent throughout the land and it was to those he came to be a friend and it was to those that he called his disciples to share their fishing story with those they would encounter as they travelled from place to place.

In the case of Isaiah, we see a young person who was a part of a community that had done, and were continuing to do, that which was wrong in the eyes of God. We find this outlined in the first five books of Isaiah. Isaiah was a part of what was going on in the world around him. So, what we see in this passage is Isaiah in the temple to worship being converted, to use more popular language. All of a sudden in this experience he sees God high and lifted up and in that experience he sees three things: 1) the righteousness of God 2) the sin of the people and 3) his own sin. We are just like Peter when we are able to see God and his great love for us demonstrated, in early days in the Christ, and like Peter we are caught short when we compare who we are with who God is and we see our Sin.

Then, when we look at both experiences, one of Isaiah in the temple who was able to see the nature of God so clearly and the one of Peter on the boat with Jesus who was able to see the power and nature of God in this Christ, and we find both of them being called to speak for God for the salvation and redemption of the people.

When you and I have been "converted" —changed—sent in a new direction—however we want to describe it—we are sent on a mission which is not our own.

Isiah says it clearly, after he heard that his sins could be forgiven, he then heard the “*voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us? And I said, “Here am I, send me!”* And immediately he heard the word of the Lord, “*Go and say to this people.*”

We have a story of two people who realized that there were in the presence of the living God and were—sinful though they were—being recruited to call others to recognized the gift of new life for sinful people.

Again, you may say, I don’t know the Bible that well, I cannot speak well, and any number of other excuses we may give—but we are often to go and tell without using words, but living in such a way that all the world will know that we are Christians and in seeing us will see the message we are sharing.

Did you notice that Isaiah said he that I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips. Often an everyday conversation will convict us or it can be used to bring redemption to others.

Jesus calls us to come and be his disciples so that he might utilize us to call others to be his disciples. Jesus gathers us to himself in the church in order to send us out from himself into the world. He calls us and also promises to teach us how to do the calling and the sending that he expects of us.

After directing his disciples toward a miraculous catch of fish, Jesus calls them to follow him, promising that he will teach them to catch people. This is the story of the call of Isaiah to be a prophet, a spokesperson for God.

In this Sunday’s gospel we are in the same boat with Jesus and his disciples. It has been a long, frustrating night of failed fishing for the disciples even though some of them were full time, professional fishermen before they were called to hit the road with Jesus.

Some years ago, desperate to revive a dwindling congregation, the church secured the services of a church consultant who spent two days talking with every congregational leader in that church, studying their statistics and then reporting on what they needed to do to have a future in their beloved, historic building. The leadership of the congregation enthusiastically embraced the consultant’s recommendations.

As he departed the next morning, the consultant and the pastor walked through the church’s sanctuary. He looked up at the large stained-glass window over the door.

“*What’s that scene?*” he asked. “*You’re obviously not a Methodist,*” I said with a laugh, “*That’s an iconic moment from John Wesley’s ministry. Refused access to an Anglican pulpit by a bishop who thought Wesley was nuts, Wesley stood on his father’s tomb and preached to a group gathered in the cemetery. I don’t need permission to preach in this parish,’ scoffed Wesley, ‘the world is my parish.’*”

“*My chief recommendation,*” said the consultant, “*is to end every service by having your congregation turn and face that window. That image ought to be in their minds every time they depart, their mission isn’t in this building; it’s in the world.”*

Jesus didn’t die for the church. He thinks the whole world is his. Don’t you find it interesting that when Jesus said, “*Follow me*” to Peter, he didn’t follow up with “*Believe the following things about me,*” or “*Now give ten percent of your income to a religious institution,*” or even “*sign on the dotted line that you have accepted me as your personal savior.*” He gave Peter a command and a promise. Follow me. I’ll teach you how to catch people.

I was visiting in a congregation a long time ago when at the end of the service, the pastor said, “*Repeat after me*” as he reminded the congregation of their mission. The congregation responded joyfully, “*The Mission is fishin’!*”

One of the lay people said to me as I left the building, “*He has us say that every week. THE MISSION IS FISHIN’ .Let’s go fishin’!*”

And, remember, if they won’t come to your building after you have caught them, remember Christ came for the world—the entire world. What does it do for our idea of being a disciple when we hear Jesus say to us, “*The world is my parish.*” That certainly helps me to see all the people of God’s world to be my mission field—and your mission field.