

## Text Study for Sunday, January 22, 2017

### *Come Fish with Me!*

#### Prayer of the Day

*Lord Jesus of fisher folk, You taught your disciples to cast a wide net -- not for fish, but for people. Teach us the fishing craft. Make our fingers nimble so we may handle hearts and hands gently; make our minds quiet and patient while we wait for those who are not yet ready to receive you; and make our hearts hungry for your word, for the sake of the one who has captured our hearts already, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Luke 5:1-11

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.

- \* ***Take some time to discuss this passage. What jumps out at you? What do you find curious or confusing?***

This is probably one of the more familiar stories in the Bible ~ well, at least we are familiar with Jesus saying something about fishing for people. Many of us can likely sing the Sunday School song, "I Will Make You Fishers of Men!" complete with the actions! But in order to get the full impact of this command to follow Jesus, we really need to look at the story that led to Jesus' familiar saying, because there's a lot happening here.

First of all, doesn't it seem just a little bit strange that Jesus just walked up to a boat (Simon's boat), sat down, and asked him to row out a little ways for him? And then, after hearing him speak, Simon calls him "master." The word "master" as used here by Simon means something like "boss." This indicates that even before the miraculous catch of fish, Simon already recognizes that Jesus has some authority that he needs to honor.

True, a couple of stories before this, Jesus healed the mother-in-law of a man named Simon, but we aren't even sure if that's the same Simon. If it was the same man, doesn't it seem like an overreaction for Simon to fall down on his knees and cry out in fear so dramatically after the miraculous catch of fish, when there is no recording of any reaction from Simon to Jesus miraculously healing his mother-in-law or the many other healings that he performed that same day (see Luke 4:38-41)?

Perhaps hearing Jesus speak to the crowds put Simon over the edge of believing. We know that there were others in Jesus' day who claimed to be healers. Maybe Simon was skeptical about Jesus until he saw something so amazing (all those fish after a fishless night!) that he couldn't question the idea of Jesus being more than a common, ordinary man any longer.

**\* *A man has come into our community and is talking about God. How big a miracle would it take for you to believe that he was someone more than a common ordinary man? How much would it take for you to leave all that you had to follow him?***

The activity of fishing depended on the difficult, meticulous activity of keeping the nets clean of anything that would eat away at them (although Lake Genneseret [or Sea of Galilee elsewhere] is freshwater), along with getting rid of any gunk or junk they might pick up in the lake. It also meant that the nets would have to be mended, and ready to be used again on the next day. This was very time-consuming and a lot of work! It was an act of honor that a fisher like Simon, after doing this kind of work, would let a non-fisher like Jesus direct him back into the familiar waters to try again. It meant possibly going through the whole activity of cleaning the nets once again. Plus, Simon was the expert and he knew this was not a good time to fish in the lake, especially after such a miserable night.

And so they Simon graciously moves out to deep water and lowers his nets into the water like he has done countless times before. But something odd began to happen. The nets filled up to the point of breaking! So Simon signaled for his fishing partners on shore to bring out the other boat with its nets to help. Soon their nets, too, were overflowing, and they had dumped so many fish into the boats as the nets kept filling, that the boats themselves began to sink! Do you think Jesus was smiling a little as he saw these fishermen, scrambling to get the nets in the boats, calling out for help, too busy to even stop to wonder or ask what's going on?

And Simon is completely dazed. Seeing the power and authority this man Jesus has, even over the fish of the sea, Simon falls down at Jesus' feet and begs Jesus to let him follow him and be his disciple.

Uh, no, he doesn't, does he. He doesn't want to be anywhere near Jesus! In fact, he not only doesn't ask to be his disciple ~ he does just the opposite. He's scared!

Falling down at Jesus' feet, he confesses his sinfulness, and in fear and trembling asks Jesus to leave his presence. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). Something about Simon's grasping the meaning of the great catch of fish leads him to see his own sinfulness and unworthiness to be in the presence of this miracle-maker. From what we have read in scripture about Simon, this would be a rare moment of humility for him, right? Usually we see Simon sticking his foot in his mouth, running ahead, being out in front of the pack. But not here; "here we find him in a moment of true humility" (*Working Preacher, Narrative*).

\* ***You have just seen a man ~ a stranger ~ do something wonderful that you didn't think was possible to do. Some would classify it a miracle. Would your reaction be similar to Simon's? Would you run? Would you fall at his feet?***

Luke's Gospel points out God's abundance for God's people over and over. This is clearly the instance here. There's not only a nice catch of fish ~ it's almost more than they can handle! Certainly more than anyone would ever expect! One commentary suggests that this catch of fish symbolizes the future missionary work and the resultant success of Simon Peter and the other disciples. They could not have imagined what their witness would eventually do to spreading the good news of Jesus ~ not only in the world they knew, but in a world far beyond their imagination!

This same commentary suggests that the story of the disciples catching nothing the night before and then pulling in abundance once he is there symbolizes that the disciples, "left to themselves in the night of this world, are doomed to failure. With Jesus' help and direction, they are granted startling success" ([faithfutures.org](http://faithfutures.org)).

And then, here in yet another story, we find the words of God that offer comfort and peace of mind: "Do not be afraid." How many stories of scripture can you think of that have that familiar phrase in them? The King James version includes 29 instances of the phrase "be not afraid." The New American Standard Bible includes the phrases "do not fear" **57 times** and "do not be afraid" **46 times**. Some argue that "fear not" and similar phrases are present in the bible **365 times**. Different versions of the Bible will translate those phrases differently. That's why there is a discrepancy in the number depending upon the version.

But it really doesn't matter how many times it's found in the Bible; just know that it's an important message that God wants to say to God's people time and time again ~ certainly an indication of God's love and concern for us all the time!

- \* ***Do you think we have something to fear in our world today? How does God fit into the picture? How helpful to you are the words, "Do not be afraid" in scripture?***

So what in the world is Jesus thinking?? Simon falls before Jesus and admits that he is a sinner and Jesus doesn't even tell him to repent! He doesn't tell him to go and sin no more; he doesn't tell him to sell all that he has and then come back and talk. Jesus says "Do not be afraid." And then Jesus invites him to come and fish for people with him! Is it possible that, sinful people that we are, Jesus invites us to come along with him as well? Is it possible that even though the world (and sometimes facebook and sometimes even our own heart) repeatedly tries to tell us that we're not good enough because of one thing or another ~ that Jesus invites us to come along? What a radical thought in this world of put-down and judgment.

- \* ***Has anyone ever told you that you were not good enough? How did that affect you? Does it make a difference that you are always good enough for Jesus ~ that Jesus loves you, "warts and all"?***

Simon was not called by Jesus to catch people because he was so good at catching fish! Simon was called by Jesus to catch people because Jesus can use him just the way he is to spread the good news of Jesus so that others can also be caught in God's net of love.

“From now on you will be catching people,” says Jesus. And what do they do? They bring the boats back to shore, leave everything, and follow him. That phenomenal catch of fish apparently affected the rest of those fishermen just like it did Simon!

One pastor, summing everything up, leaves us with this thought: *“A part of me hopes that there was at least one hard-hearted sinner among the fishers, to deal with two boatloads of fish and not to let them just sit there and rot. Yuck!”*

Where’s Paul Harvey when you need “the rest of the story”?

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

## **THE LORD’S PRAYER**