

FROM NOW ON, YOU WILL FISH FOR PEOPLE

Luke 5:1-11

Key Verse: 5:10b

“Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’”

Jesus preached his inaugural sermon in his hometown of Nazareth saying, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me...to proclaim good news to the poor...”** (4:18) The people were amazed at first, but then they began to judge him as a local average person. So Jesus challenged them a little. Then their attitude changed and they wanted to throw him off a cliff. But Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on his way. He went down to Capernaum, a port city on the northern end of the Lake of Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee, about 20 miles east and north of Nazareth (see map). Capernaum would be a key city of ministry for Jesus. Jesus showed his divine authority over demons and diseases by driving some demons out of people and healing the sick. The first healing took place at the home of Simon, when Jesus rebuked a fever in Simon’s mother-in-law and it left her. Many more sick people came and Jesus healed them too. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting at Jesus, **“You are the Son of God!”** They recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The people wanted Jesus to stay a while but he said that he was sent to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God and he had to move on to other towns. So he kept preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

In this chapter, Luke introduces the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. Until then, many crowds had gathered to hear Jesus and to be helped and healed. In today’s passage, Jesus calls some fishermen to follow him and work with him for the kingdom of God. Three are mentioned by name: Simon, James and John. It is likely that Simon’s brother Andrew was also there. Through this passage let’s focus on three things: the urgency of God’s word, putting out into deeper water with Jesus, and finding life direction in Jesus.

I. The urgency of God’s word (1-3)

Look at verse 1. **“One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.”** Jesus was at our near Capernaum, which was a seaport on the north end of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee, also known as Lake Gennesaret, was 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, which is about 8 times bigger than Lake Geneva in Wisconsin. Or imagine the part of Lake Michigan from Loyola Beach to Navy Pier and then 8 miles out square from shore. That was how big the lake was.

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Jesus was walking along the lakeshore teaching God's word and people crowded around him to hear. Isn't it beautiful that people crowded around Jesus to hear his wonderful teaching? Where there are people who delight to hear God's word, there is hope for that community. There is hope for Chicago and the United States because there are still many people who delight to hear God's word: they love Bible study and worshipping at church, listening to Christian radio and reading Christian books. But it isn't enough. We need a revival of God's word in our nation, our city, our campuses, our work places, our families, beginning with whom?--you and me. Jesus did not ignore the crowds. At the same time, Jesus was looking around for a few followers who could grow as leaders to work with him for God's kingdom.

Now look at verses 2-3. **“He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 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.”** Jesus found a better way to minister God's word to the crowds by borrowing someone's boat. Jesus was not confined to the synagogue to teach God's word. The lakeside was just fine to teach and preach God's word. Did you know that the word of God is not limited to Jesus or to preachers or to church services? Anyone who has and believes God's word can share it with others. It is not confined to a few people. The Bible says **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”** (Ro 10:15). Beautiful feet are those that go to others to love and help them. Beautiful words are the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus shows that we can speak God's word any time, any place to anyone who is willing to listen. I'm so thankful right now for five spiritually young men who volunteered to be group Bible study leaders and who are ministering to over 25 people with God's word. It might seem small and insignificant to some people. But they have beautiful feet and beautiful words of life. Are you ministering God's word to anyone in your life: a child, a brother or sister, a friend, a neighbor, a classmate, a workmate? The word of God is not meant to be left on a shelf. Listen to Isaiah 55:10-11, **“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** God's word is living and active and it will produce fruit for God.

There is another reason that Jesus used Simon's boat, other than having a better vantage point to teach the crowds on the shore. It was also a better vantage point to reach Simon the fisherman. When Jesus saw him, Simon was washing his

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nets. He was not at the lakeshore to listen to Jesus. He just happened to be there that morning. To Simon, washing his nets was more urgent and important than listening to Jesus. But Jesus did not think so. Jesus knew that Simon needed the word of God more than fish. Jesus wanted Simon to hear his teaching. So he borrowed his boat. Simon was tired. But he could not get away from Jesus without being rude. So he had to sit quietly near Jesus and hear his teaching. Jesus is showing us that we need to spend time listening to him, not just doing our own business.

Are you listening to Jesus? Are you listening now? Do you listen to his word more than just on Sunday at church? Please do a self-analysis: how much time do you spend reading and watching unnecessary things on your computer or on television or on your phone? Now compare: how much time do you spend reading the Bible or listening to God-honoring talk or music? Are you more influenced by worldly or even ungodly musicians or pop stars than by people of faith? How we invest our eyes and ears is shaping who we are and what we will leave behind in life. If we speak in anger or rude words around our children, that's what they will learn and practice. God's word is urgent for each one of us: for me and for you.

II. Put out into deeper water with Jesus (4-7)

As Jesus taught the crowds on the seashore, Simon had no choice but to listen patiently until Jesus was done. Simon must've been hoping that Jesus' teaching would not be too long, so he could get home and get some sleep. But that was not to be. Notice verse 4: **“When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”** We already know that Simon had been fishing all night long and hadn't caught a thing. Jesus also knew this, because Simon was washing his nets with no fish in the boat. Simon must've been washing his nets with feelings of anger and despair. What happens when you work hard and have nothing to show for it? You might get angry. You might blame someone. You might despair. You might want to quit. Simon was exhausted and hungry. Still, he was washing his nets when Jesus saw him. Still, he was willing to let Jesus use his boat for an hour or two to preach from.

Jesus was saying to Simon, **“Let's go out to the deep, and catch some fish.”** Put yourself in Simon's sandals. I think Simon wanted to say, “You've got to be kidding! I tried all night. No fish in sight. Besides, I'm the veteran fisherman here. What do you know about fishing? Aren't you a carpenter's son? Isn't your

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job preaching? Please don't pretend you're a better fisherman than I am!" Simon could've gotten angry or sarcastic at Jesus.

But look at his answer in verse 5: **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”** Notice that Simon called Jesus, **“Master.”** The Greek word here for **“Master”** only occurs in Luke’s gospel. It is similar to “Rabbi” or “Teacher” or “Supervisor” or “Boss.” Simon was tired and frustrated for his all night of fruitless labor. Yet, he curbed his pride and his feelings and said, **“But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”** Because you say so. Simon had enough respect for Jesus to do what he said, even if he didn’t feel like it or agree with it. Have you ever done that? Have you ever taken Jesus at his word, doing what he said, even though you thought you had good reasons not to listen? Try it some time, and see if something amazing will happen. Following Jesus means denying yourself, what you think and feel, to do what Jesus wants for you or what his word says to you.

Remember Naaman the Syrian? He curbed his pride and listened to the prophet Elisha, washing himself seven times in the Jordan, even though he thought it was ridiculous. Then what happened? He was healed of his leprosy. A poor widow in Sidon was about to make her last meal for herself and her son to eat it and die. But the prophet Elijah told her, **“First make a small loaf of bread for me, and then make something for yourself and your son...”** When she did so, what happened? Her flour and oil did not run out day after day and she lived through the famine.

What happened when Simon obeyed? He and his partners caught so many fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled for help from their fishing buddies and filled two boats so full that they began to sink. The blessing of God was overflowing.

Jesus wants us to go deeper in our relationship with him. He doesn't want us to be occasional friends or distant acquaintances. He invites us into a deeper, personal walk with him, or in this case, boat ride. He wants us to **“Put out into deep water, and let down our nets for a catch.”** He could be prompting us to be more involved in church or Bible study or music or hospitality or some other way of service or help in Jesus' name. He could be urging us to pray for a needy friend and invite them to church or Bible study. It might take us out of our comfort zone. I'm pretty sure it will. But we can't give to Jesus more than he gives back. That's his promise (Lk 18:29-30).

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III. From now on, you will fish for people (8-11)

This part is about finding life direction in Jesus. Verse 8 suddenly introduces Simon as Simon Peter. It was a turning point in his life, so that even his name was changed. Actually, Simon's eyes could have bulged with dollar signs, seeing the prosperous business and money he could make with Jesus. But rather, he became afraid. He fell on his face at Jesus' knees and said, **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”**

The great catch of fish put the fear of God in Peter. It freaked him out. He saw Jesus differently. He didn't call him, **“Master”** this time, but **“Lord.”** He saw divinity in Jesus. Somehow Jesus made all those fish come to their nets, or he created more fish. Peter had never seen or heard of such a catch of fish in his entire life of fishing. He realized that Jesus is Lord of the fish and of the sea.

When Simon Peter saw holiness in Jesus, his eyes were opened to his own sinfulness. He didn't feel worthy to even be in the same boat with Jesus. He said, **“Go away, Lord! I'm such a sinner!”** The closer a person gets to God, the more they see how sinful they are. They don't feel better about themselves. It is like the closer we get to the light, the more we see our own dirtiness, ugliness and darkness. The light exposes all our sin and we see ourselves as unclean and wretched. It happened to Jacob when he wrestled with an angel (Gen 32:30; Hos 12:4) and to Isaiah when he saw God on his throne (6:5) and to Job when God spoke to him out of the storm (42:6) and to Paul when he was blinded by the light of Jesus (Ac 9:5; 1Ti 1:15). When someone encounters the holy God, they cannot demand anything but only ask for mercy. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner! Have you recognized that Jesus was nailed to the cross and shed his blood for you, for your sins, not just for murderers, rapists, and thieves, but for you? We may not think we are so sinful compared with really bad sinners. But before a holy, perfect, sinless God, no one can stand. We all stand condemned worthy of judgment. Without a Savior, without a redeemer, without a lamb to be sacrificed for us, we stand guilty to be condemned before the Judge of our souls.

At the moment Simon Peter felt condemned, Jesus spoke to him saying, **“Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”** Jesus took away his fear. Jesus can take away our fear, because he took our guilt and punishment on the cross. Jesus forgives and calls all who trust in him. **“Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”** Until that moment, Simon had dedicated his life to fishing. It was his occupation and his preoccupation. He subscribed to all the fishing magazines to improve his trade. He lived and breathed fishing. It was his

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livelihood. It was his survival. But Jesus gave him a glimpse of a new life, a better life, a life serving Christ and his kingdom. **“From now on you will fish for people.”**

Jesus was calling him to a new life direction in him. Jesus was giving him a new purpose, a new reason to live. Jesus called him into ministry with him to expand God’s kingdom through preaching, teaching, healing and driving out demons. From now on, he would catch people. He would influence people for the kingdom of God. Jesus’ hope and vision for Simon to become St. Peter was correct. Peter was a key founder in the Christian church, who spread the gospel of Jesus in faithfulness with power. On the day of Pentecost, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter caught 3,000 for the kingdom of God. Of course, at the moment of this great catch of fish, Peter still had much to grow. He would have ups and downs. But Peter accepted the call. He left his fishing career and committed himself as a full time follower of Jesus.

Jesus spoke in words that Simon, a fisherman, could easily relate to: **“From now on, you will fish for people.”** Jesus speaks to us in words we can relate to. Jesus wants to transform our lives and use each one of us greatly for his kingdom work. To a soldier, Jesus might say, “From now on, you will fight sin and darkness.” To a runner, he might say, “From now on, you will run the race of faith.” To an auto mechanic: “From now on, you will repair broken hearts and homes.” To a data entry person: “From now on, you will help to enter names in the Book of Life.” To a computer programmer: “From now on, you will get with God’s program.” To someone working in the medical field: “From now on, you will bring God’s healing to many lives.” To someone who works at a power company: “From now on, you will bring God’s power into people’s lives.” Jesus takes our lives and transforms them for God’s glory to bear much fruit for God’s kingdom.

Jesus calls us also to follow him full time, not necessarily in full time ministry, but as 24/7 Christians, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, following Jesus, not as part time Christians who attend church occasionally according to convenience. For full time followers of Jesus, “Christian” is not something to just write on a job resume. Christian is their first, primary identity. Christians are those who belong to Jesus. Christians live in Jesus, through Jesus and for Jesus.

What is your passion? What do you love to talk about? What consumes your thought world? What do you spend so much time and energy and money on? For

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many, it's their career. For many others, it's a person on earth. Still for others, it's a hope of achievement, or their fitness or appearance.

Jesus promises us something better, far better. Jesus promises so much more than the world can give. Simon Peter saw this through the great catch of fish, directed by Jesus. Fish were not so important to Simon any more. They grew strangely dim. The kingdom of God became real, his real hope, his true life direction. He decided to follow Jesus, no turning back. And he did. And the rest is history. Moses gave up the palace life to follow God. Dwight Moody gave up his dream to be a millionaire shoe salesman, and he decided to catch people as an evangelist. Have you decided to follow Jesus? Is he your passion? Your purpose? Your hope? May God have mercy on you and me to go deeper in our relationship with Jesus and to really live for him and for his kingdom.