



Luke 5:1-11

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*Peter's response to Jesus is biblical; in many ways reminiscent of Isaiah and Elisha. Breaking with his former life, Peter becomes the first apostle. In the Church today we guilty of a half-heated faith. Is there any wonder then that our nets our empty?*

Fish stories; we've all heard about fish stories. In our vernacular a fish story is a tall tale, the blatant exaggeration of a half truth. You can find theologians who would go at this morning's gospel with scientific eyes, as though it were a tall tale. Schools of biblical criticism look for rational explanations to the miracles of Jesus. Under the guise of being faithful, and wanting to get at the truth they dissect the Word with something less than reverence. What they want to do is *minimize* what they claim is an exaggerated reading of history and the text. They assume that there must be a logical explanation as to all those fish stories which involve Jesus. In this morning's case, why did all those fish suddenly jump out of the lake into the nets?

But the first thing we wonder, how does a carpenter know when and where the experienced fisherman can find an abundant catch—a super-abundant catch—a miraculous catch? And, why does Simon listen to Jesus? Does it have something to do with Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law in the previous chapter? You be the judge. That Simon addresses Jesus as "*Master*" before the miracle ought to tell you something.

What is instructive for us are the varied responses to Jesus. Certainly the father of James and John—Zebedee, he was there to see what happened. From Matthew 4 we know that he remains behind to empty the boats, care for the nets and sell the fish. We hear nothing more of him. Some people just don't see, and some won't listen. Some are too encumbered with the cares of life to act.

In response to Jesus, Peter along with James and John, become disciples and later apostles. The skeptics claim it's irresponsible, to say nothing of being unreasonable, for three of them to just walk away from their livelihood—it's a fish story. People *en masse* just don't drop what they're doing and go chasing after God. At best a sane individual might struggle about such a decision, they pray about it.

***Luke presents Peter's response to Jesus as thoroughly Biblical***

But not Peter. The catch was unmistakably a miracle. It was a clear sign that pointed to some-

thing so much more important than merely making a living. It pointed them to Jesus; to Jesus as to God! As such this morning's reading is not about Peter, it's about God, about how God calls us to lives of faith. Peter knows this is how God works.

In 1 Kings 19 we find Elijah calling Elisha into God's service; Elisha will be God's next prophet. The younger was plowing with a yoke of oxen when called. "Let me go say goodbye to my father," he says. But there is no time for that, and by grace he reconsiders. The plowing stops, the oxen are sacrificed, and he's off to serve the LORD. In a similar way each of Jesus' disciples will answer the call of God. Leaving everything behind, making a radical break with their former way of life, they will preach the dawning of God's kingdom.

You recall Matthew-Levi. He abandons his lucrative tax collecting office to follow Jesus. What a faith statement that made! In our district we have an engineer who left his drafting board to pastor a church, and we personally know a successful insurance salesman and financial advisor who left our own congregation to follow the Lord Jesus. Fish stories? Not at all.

James and John follow Jesus, leaving their family and the business behind them. We don't know about each of them individually, but Peter got it. He understood what was happening, falling on his knees before Jesus, Peter shouts, "*Get away from me, for I am a sinful man!*" Peter knew in the core of his being that he was in the presence of the Divine. He behaves very much like the prophet: Isaiah 6. Peterson's *THE MESSAGE BIBLE* captures the moment: "*I'm a sinner and I can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.*"

**Don't we belong with Peter,  
on our knees?**

As I said, this is ultimately God's story, not Peter's. It's not in God's character to leave us to ourselves. God the gift-giver so loved the world that he gave it his Son, Jesus Christ. God through his disciples peruses us and offers us Jesus, his arms extended on a cross. The Jesus we want to love, the priest we are called to serve, and Savior we flee and finally follow is the one who became man and died (was crucified) in our stead on the cross. Jesus who died and rose is God in the flesh. It's Gospel, not a tall tale.

Something tells me that if you and I truly understood and believed the Gospel, you and I would with Peter, trembling and on our knees. The call to be his disciple is serious stuff, and I'm starting to think we're a lot more like Mr. Zebedee, a witness to the wonder, but not inclined to get up because we already have so much on our family plate.

If we believed the gospel we preach, would we misuse God's gifts (1 Co. 14)? If we believe the Word why do we so half-heartedly approach the communion rail? The poet declares,

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand.*

*Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand,*

*Christ our God to earth descending, comes our homage to demand.*

*(5<sup>th</sup> Century, LSB 621:1)*

We respond as half-hearted disciples, ours is a less-than-enthusiastic response; ours tends toward a lukewarm witness. Is there any wonder that our nets and boats are empty? And with bait like that, what would we catch?

If the Twelve were successful witnesses to the Gospel, perhaps it's because they were not afraid to speak of the things they saw and heard—no matter how far fetched the story seemed.

Christians are called to fish for the souls of men, women and children wherever we encounter them. You are not apostles, God has not called you to preach. But tell the story that you can do. Tell it as part of your personal life story as most certainly Peter told of his encounter with the living God. Such a story doesn't have to be a tall tale, merely the simplicity of the truth as you know it. It will not smell of rotting fish, but it will be a fragrant perfume. As our prayers to God are like incense to him, so to spread the knowledge and love of God everywhere is a pleasing aroma to our him, through Jesus Christ, the Lord (2 Cor. 2:14 ff).

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