

## **A FISHING STORY**

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

**Luke 5:1-11**

**Some of the greatest stories I've heard involve fishing. A few of them even involve fish, though many of the funniest ones do not. There are some days when anyone can catch fish – all you have to do is throw the bait out and a fish will bite. There are other days when even the best fisherfolk cannot catch a fish for one reason or another. Then there are days when it is possible, but you have to use your skill and knowledge and wit to catch them. Everybody dreams of catching the big one, the one that usually gets away, that will form the heart of a great story for the rest of their lives.**

**Today's story is a fishing story which has a number of different elements to it. It takes place early in the ministry of Jesus alongside the Sea of Galilee at a small fishing village named Capernaum, which became Jesus' home base while in the Galilee region. After last week's story, in which Jesus was**

run out of his home town of Nazareth, Jesus came to Capernaum. He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath and performed healings, including of Simon's mother in law. He moves around to other towns in the Galilee, teaching in synagogues and healing the sick. He develops quite a following.

Luke, not a disciple of Jesus who followed him during his lifetime, has inherited a slightly different version of these early days and of the call of the first disciples than the other Gospel writers. Matthew and Mark portray a rather instantaneous call/response situation in which Jesus is walking alongside the Sea of Galilee and calls the first disciples to follow him, and they immediately drop their nets and follow him.

Luke's story gives us more detail and background about why those disciples followed Jesus. Luke tells us that many people were pressing around Jesus to hear him teach. He needed some separation from the crowd in order to teach.

He saw two boats which were not being used because the fishermen to whom they belonged were out of their boats

washing their nets, which meant they were through for the day. Jesus stepped into one of the boats and asked its owner, Simon, to take him out a little ways from the shore where he could sit down and teach the crowds.

So Jesus had a throng of people who were already hooked, who were following him around and hanging on every word.

Then he had these fishermen, who were busy with their work. It was going to take some knowledge and some skill to bring them into the boat. So he immediately gave one of them a job, the job of taking him out in the boat.

My father was a preacher and an avid fisherman. He liked to joke that the good thing about fishing was that he would have a captive audience for a few hours. Well, Jesus turned Simon into a captive audience as they sat in the boat together while Jesus taught the crowd.

When Jesus finished teaching the crowd, he turned his attention to Simon, telling him to put the boat out into the deep water and put down his nets for a catch. He was not eager to do

so. He had already washed out his nets and made ready for going out the next night. He said, “Master, we worked all night and caught nothing.” He was tired, he was hungry, he was ready to go home. Nevertheless, he did what Jesus told him to do. Simon was skeptical about the possibility of catching fish at this time of day, but he has seen and heard enough of Jesus that he is willing to make the effort and see what happens. After all, in the preceding chapter we saw Jesus healing Simon’s mother in law.

So Simon took the boat out to deeper water and let his nets down, and immediately his nets became so loaded with fish that they began breaking. He called his partners, and they quickly brought the other boat to help land the catch. Both boats were filled with so many fish that they began to sink.

Simon’s response is eye opening. I would think he would be jumping up and down, laughing, hugging Jesus, thinking about how he would market all this fish and how he could convince Jesus to become a partner in the business. But

instead he falls on his knees before Jesus and exclaims, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Fishing was his job. This was his lake. He knew this catch hadn’t just happened.

Leonard Sweet explains it well, saying, “Simon Peter suddenly realizes that he is not just standing in the middle of two boatloads of fish. He is standing in the middle of a God-moment, a divine miracle. With just a word, Jesus had made these fishers more successful than they had ever dreamed possible. But Simon Peter didn’t feel like a winner. Instead, he was overcome by his own human sinfulness and inadequacy. In despair, not in thanks for all this bounty, Simon Peter collapses at Jesus’ knees.

“As economic security flips and flops about his feet, Simon Peter next hears from Jesus the words that will truly transform his life. It is a message that completely rejects the miracle of wealth that fills the boats. Jesus calls Simon Peter away from a life and lifestyle that has just now grown immensely richer and

**easier. Leave off catching fish, Jesus calls, 'from now on you will be catching people.'**

**"This simple fisherman and his companions are so moved by the spirit of Jesus and the power of his presence that they take a truly stunning course of action. Hauling the loaded boats ashore, these fishermen abandon their new wealth and leave behind their old symbols of security. The Bible says 'they left everything and followed him.'" (Homiletics, Feb., 1998, p. 52)**

**It was one thing for Simon to see Jesus heal his mother in law. I guess there could have been coincidence in that. Her fever might have been about to break one way or the other. There was much that Simon would not have understood about sickness. But to experience this miracle at work was a different matter altogether. I'm sure Simon thought there wasn't anything he didn't know about fishing. He thought he knew that this could not happen.**

**Seeing it happen shattered any doubts he might have had about Jesus. It made him realize that there was a lot about the**

world that he did not know. It shattered his understanding of what the future held for him, to the point that he left that huge catch and his boats and his old life behind in order to follow Jesus into the future this extraordinary individual was going to usher in.

When I went to college I assumed I would get an education and then go back home and get a job and live pretty much the way I was used to. While I was at college a president was impeached, the Arab oil embargo caused gas shortages and utility shutdowns, and there were a variety of other national and international crises. So much was called into question regarding my assumptions about the world and my place in it. While confidence in everything else was eroding, what found its way to the top was this guy who walked around doing good, being kind, and offering hope to everyone. That began a journey from viewing Jesus as an interesting part of my life to the central figure in my life.

I doubt that makes much sense to you, though the unsettling chaos of our country in recent years may signal a similar period in history. Simon Peter's response to the things that happened in the boat that day doesn't necessarily make a lot of sense either, which may be why Matthew and Mark just tell that Jesus walked by and told the fishermen to follow and they did. "Ah, who would believe it if we told it," they might have thought. Our eyes and ears can show us the nets that are breaking, but the breaking of other things that goes on inside us is not so visible or explainable.

Last summer after 39 years pastoring churches I responded to a different sort of call - the call to retire. That didn't mean I thought God was through with me. I did think I needed freedom to focus on family more, and I realized that I was no longer capable of juggling all the responsibilities of pastoring a large staff and congregation.

But I also knew I needed to continue making a difference with churches. My last week of work a former member who now



**lives out of state stopped by to see me, not knowing I was retiring. While most people were telling me to enjoy retirement, he said, “David, don’t be one of those people who retires and just goes home and does nothing. God has given you too many gifts to squander them like that.” That was a call experience, and I am taking it seriously.**

**That’s why I was willing to commit to preaching here a Sunday a month to give John a little more freedom while continuing to do what he loves here with people he loves. That’s why I agreed to serve as mentor to some elders who are working to become commissioned ruling elders who will be authorized to serve in some of our smaller churches. And who knows what the future might hold in the way of calls to serve.**

**I hope you can view your lives in the same way, as adventures in which you never know what Jesus might call you to do in his service. It may be that the one who walks by the seashore of our lives is reaching out to you and is, in some way, calling you to fish for something different in your life. As we**

**participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper this morning  
we have a good opportunity to renew our commitments to serve  
in the name of the One who gave all in service to us.**

**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen.**

**David J. Bailey**

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**Midway Presbyterian Church**

**Anderson, SC**