

Sermon
McCarter Presbyterian Church
5th Sunday after Pentecost
February 10, 2019

Old Testament Lesson

Psalm 138:4-8

NT Lesson and Subject of Sermon

Luke 5:1-11 NRSV

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 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."

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Ultimate Fishing Guide

We may have a few fishermen here among us, and if we do, thank you for being here today. It isn't easy to come to church when your mind is somewhere else, landing the "big one," so we all appreciate your presence with us today. As you might guess, I am familiar with the "ins and outs" of **fishing**: not as a profession, as we find in our **scripture lesson**, but recreational fishing from the shore or in a boat with a pole and live bait or with a good rod and reel, working a lure. I must tell you that my abilities are pretty limited, but I kind of get the basics of it. Fishing is something I enjoy, but it is not my life's passion. Thankfully, unlike **Simon Peter** and the others in our scripture lesson, I do not depend on my skills at fishing in order to make a living and provide for my family.

On the other hand, if my father could have fished for a living, I believe he would have been a much happier person. But, I suppose he would have fished and eaten about half of the profits, because he loved to prepare and share what he caught. But, he really enjoyed going after the "wily" bass, the trophy fish he caught only rarely. Thanks to my father and his father, I got to fish pretty regularly as a child. I learned that fishing at the top level is pretty hard work and success often requires some talent and a good bit of pure luck.

With this in mind as we read these scriptures, we don't know how much **Jesus** knew about fishing. But, from the text for our sermon this morning, Jesus seems to be familiar with the

process of fishing on the **Sea of Galilee**, and the types of **people** that worked the water and the boats. Jesus held off revealing his **purpose** for this excursion into the fisherman's world until the end of our scripture lesson. From a boat rental for a preaching and teaching lesson to unprecedented fishing instructions, a whole lot goes on in these verses. In the end, Jesus makes an **extraordinary demand** on the fishermen: Come with me. I will make you fish for people (Luke 5:10).

Now, that is a **call** if I ever heard one, because I have felt God's call and acted on it more than once. But, none of those experiences were as frank and bold as this statement to Simon, called **Peter**, and to James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10b-d). From two boats and these three fishermen, we get the first **recruiting class** for Jesus. And, from what we know about these men and the other nine that join them, nobody would make the "A-list" for job candidates. In fact, Jesus did little to evaluate them, as far as we know.

This is one of the great **lessons** here and throughout the Gospel story: **Ordinary people** are called by Jesus in the middle of their **ordinary lives**. But, because of God's power in Jesus **extra-ordinary things** begin to happen. The fishing experience directed by Jesus is a great example of this. To better understand this, we should know that scholars believe that the disciples were using a form of a **drag net** that would sweep along behind the boat, or even between the two boats. I have done something like this with a **100-foot seine**, a long net, in the breakers at the beach. That excursion required five or six of us to handle this huge net, working it against the current and onto the beach in water up to our necks. As difficult as it was, it was **highly effective**. A single pass with this net yielded the following: about 4 dozen shrimp, six flounder, fifteen whiting, eight red snapper, about 10 crabs (many of which escaped us), and three small sand sharks. We had enough among us to **feed ourselves** for about a week, and it took us well over an hour to do it. But it was real work. At the end, I felt like I had finished a half-mile run followed by weight training.

I would call our "haul" of seafood that day a pretty **bountiful harvest** from the sea. But, no one had ever seen or experienced a **catch of fish** that the two boats of Simon Peter, John, and James brought in that day. It was so **heavy**, that it tore the nets. The catch was so **large** that it caused the boats to sink. It was so **abundant** that it overflowed back into the sea. The **presence of Jesus**, and the power that he brought into his actions among them, was just too **overpowering**. Quickly, Peter realized that this was **no ordinary man**: something that we will see again as the **Gospel story** moves along. He does not name Jesus as the Messiah, but he knows that he, **Simon Peter**, is a poor excuse of a **sinner** compared with this Jesus. **John and James** see something extraordinary in Jesus, as well. All three respond to the **command** of Jesus to **leave everything** and to follow him.

Over time in the Gospel story, there will be other occasions for demonstrating this abundance of **life-giving** food and sustenance: Thousands are **fed on a hillside**, and there is food left over to fill basket after basket. In Samaria, whose inhabitants were considered unclean by the Jews who worshiped in the temple, the water that came up from the well at midday nourished for a stranger soon overflows when a woman gave a needed drink to a stranger: Jesus of Nazareth. Joy of the **Good News** from Jesus soon **spread** from the woman to the village and throughout Samaria. Later, in the *Book of Acts*, **God's Spirit** descends on the disciples, and many around them, at **Pentecost** and the **church is born!**

This story of water and wonder and **overabundance** reflects the presence of God in the **sacraments** we hold in the church: **baptism** and the **Eucharist**, the Lord's supper. Thankfully, we will share the Eucharist among us this morning. As part of this **continuing gift** from Christ, we offer up the **simple elements** of bread and juice: the abundant **harvest** of fruits of the land, which have been nourished by rain and sun and gathered and stored for us. Our **sharing** at the table reminds us of the **Last Supper** of Jesus with his disciples, along the resulting capture, torture, agonizing death, and glorious **resurrection** of Jesus Christ. It also reminds of God's abundant joy, **grace, and mercy** in which we find forgiveness. The Eucharist reminds of the heavenly banquet that awaits us in another experience of God, because **God conquered death** and brought the joy of resurrection and eternal life.

When Jesus went to the shore in **Galilee** that day, he showed that he was familiar with the shore, the people, the fishermen, and life on the Sea of Galilee in bringing life and nourishment from those same waters. We could say that Jesus became the **ultimate fishing guide** that day. Certainly, Jesus was the one **in charge** that day. So, much went on that was directed by him: renting a boat to approach a **large crowd** on the shore; a meeting on the water with lifelong, serious fishermen; recommending the absolute best **fishing spot**; and witnessing the **abundance** that nearly overpowered these men, their boats, their nets, their strength, and their skill, along with their faith and their perception of **God's call**.

Jesus continues to call us **ordinary people** during the routine portions of our very routine days. All too often, we continue to listen **casually**, almost ignoring what God says to us. Like Peter that day, we might recognize how truly **deficient** we are on our own. We may resist offering a **confession**, such as the one Peter spoke to Jesus that day. But, God knows our **heart** and our inmost thoughts. At this time in our lives and in **our living**, will you and I **look to God** for our call to **life** with God in Christ? Will we yield to the **ultimate guide** for our lives in Jesus Christ? Will you and I **follow God**: the call, the wonder, and awe that is part of our **journey** with God through Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord?

In this time together at this table in the time of **thanksgiving** that follows this proclamation of God's Word, let us reflect on our **lives**, our living, and our **faith journey**. As we take the elements of the Eucharist together, and pray together, let each of us consider **our call** from Christ, our **Living Lord**.

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