

## ***We Have Worked All Night Long***

Meditation on Luke 5:1-11

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Jan. 31, 2016

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*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>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.' <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

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Does anyone here like to fish? I see people fishing from riverbanks in the morning on my way to church. I see more in the early evening, as the sun is going down, on my way home. I always wonder what they are catching --if anything --and what the best places are to fish, and what the best time of day is to go. And I wonder, are you allowed to just park your car or truck by the side of the road, set up a chair or stand on the shore and throw in your line?

I found a Website called, "Florida Go Fishing" that helped with some of my questions. "Don't overlook obvious fishing spots as you drive around," I read. "If it has water, it probably has fish. There are canals along most major roadways, both saltwater and freshwater, and you will see people fishing these canals every day. And don't overlook bridges - if there is no sign that says you can't fish, that means you can whip out your rod and fish away. If there is a safe place to pull off the road, stop and give it a try."

I learned that you have a better chance at catching fish if you know the tides. The tides, currents, wind, phases of the moon, and the weather all affect the movement of fish, feeding patterns, and whether the fish will be biting "fast and furious"--or not at all! The best time to fish is when there is moving water during the incoming rising tides. The worst time to fish is when there is no water movement during "slack tides." Slack periods can occur for several minutes to as many as nine or 10 hours. During slack periods, fish stop feeding because there are no currents to transport schools of bait within range of the game fish."

I am not an angler as you have probably already guessed. I just don't have the patience. I think my dislike of fishing started when I was little and Dad took my brother, sister, and me to a pond, baited our hooks, and helped us cast our lines into the water. Then he told us we had to sit still and be real quiet if we wanted to catch any fish. I'm not very good at being quiet or sitting still.

And though it felt like we were fishing for hours, I didn't catch a thing!

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Even if I were an avid angler today, I still would not understand our gospel account of the miraculous catch and its application to our lives without having some understanding of the culture and economy in which Jesus lived. First of all, this was not hobby fishing; these were professional fisherman, relying on a daily catch to sell and make a living, and not a very prosperous one at that. Additionally, fishing was hard, physical labor. It wasn't anything like going out with my father and siblings, sitting, casting our lines into a pond on a sunny day. It didn't matter if we caught any fish; we would still have supper that night. Mom was home probably making spaghetti and meatballs or my favorite, roast chicken.

We often hear sermons that make use of metaphors having to do with fishing poles, reels and bait, none of which appear in this scene. Peter, James and John are fishing with a net, probably made of linen, which the fish would be able to see during the day; hence, they were fishing at night. And nets were not dragged behind a moving boat. They were weighted and dropped over the side, in this case, in deep water. When it was time to bring in the nets or move to another location, the fisherman had to pull the heavy, wet nets with their catch back into the boat without any assistance from machines.

But before we get to the miracle catch, let's check out the first miracle in this passage--in the first verse! "*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret (or the Sea of Galilee), **and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God.***" Jesus, after being rejected at Nazareth and nearly pushed over a cliff when he delivered his first sermon in a synagogue, was now being pursued like a rock star. To be

fair, since Nazareth, he had preached with a favorable response in a synagogue in Capernaum, and had “astounded” the people because he spoke “with authority.” Then he reveals his power by casting an unclean spirit out of man in the same synagogue. Are any of you wondering if Jesus knew Simon Peter before the beginning of today’s passage--when he climbs into Simon’s boat and asks him to “put out a little way from the shore” so he can sit down and preach without being crushed? The answer is yes. In chapter 4, Jesus spent the night in Simon’s house, where he healed Simon’s mother-in-law of a high fever--and she immediately got up and began serving them. At Simon’s house, people with all sorts of illnesses and diseases came to Jesus, who laid hands on them and cured them. In 4:41, we learn Jesus’s identity from the demons shouting as Jesus cast them out, “You are the Son of God!”

Now in 5:1, the crowd is “pressing in” to hear his message, which Luke calls the “word of God.” This is the first reference to “word of God” in Luke. In Acts, “the word of God” is used for the message about Jesus’s death and resurrection and sometimes for Jesus’ own message. Here in Luke, he can only mean that what Jesus speaks **is** the prophetic word of God--God speaking through Jesus Christ. His Scripture would have been what we call the Old Testament today. In this scene, we see the power of God’s Word to draw people to Himself and inspire them to want to change themselves and their lives to be more pleasing, more obedient to Him.

In Luke 5:4, Jesus finishes speaking and tells Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon has already seen miraculous healings, including the healing of his own mother-in-law.

But he is fisherman. And what Jesus has just said doesn't make any sense. You don't go out during the day with linen nets to fish, especially when you have just fished all night with your crew--and caught nothing at all.

And Simon's tired. He's been up for hours! They have just washed their nets, preparing them for going back out fishing that night. He probably just wants to get back home and get some rest, but he says, respectfully, appealing to logic, speaking from the experience of a seasoned fisherman, "Master, we have worked *all night long* but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Does Simon think he's going to catch anything? Of course not! And he wants to make sure that Jesus knows he doesn't really want to do it--and that he doesn't believe they will catch any fish. Maybe so he can say, "I told you so," when they don't! Kind of like when we do something grudgingly and then we say we are doing it for the Lord, but really, we aren't, because we are doing it grudgingly.

You know how the story ends. They catch so many fish that the nets are breaking; the boats are sinking. And Simon is convicted of his sin of unbelief. It wasn't enough that he did what Jesus told him to do. He did it without faith, even after seeing the miracles the Lord had already done.

But why does he say, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"? We find out in verse 10, when Jesus responds to Simon, "Do not be afraid." Simon, in the awesome power and presence of the Lord, convicted of his sin, is terrified. Now we come to what may be the most startling thing of this passage--even more startling than the miraculous catch. After Simon confesses that he is a sinner--unworthy of being in

the presence of the Lord--Jesus assures him that he is the right man for the job. That Simon, a sinful man who doubted Christ's miracles even after personally witnessing them, was who Jesus wanted to be his disciple, "Come with me; from now on you will be catching people."

Simon Peter, James, and John, "left everything"--boats, nets, fish and their identity and jobs as fishermen--on the shore. They "left everything" and followed him.

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Friends, today we welcome new leaders of our congregation, members who have heard the call from Jesus to greater commitment in the life of this congregation. They will promise to love and serve the Lord by loving and caring for this community of faith and seeking to lead others closer to Him. This is a call to servant leadership, just as Jesus came to serve and not to be served. This is a call to be courageous and seek to please God first, rather than seeking to please people. The only way to do that is to leave our old selves and former lives behind.

To our new ruling elders and deacons, I say, "It won't be easy. You will be challenged. You will be changed. But if you submit to God's will for you and the church, the Lord will use you to reveal his awesome deeds of power--God will heal and provide, like he did in Luke 5.

Right now, you may be feeling anxious. You might be wondering, "What was I thinking by saying yes?" You might be realizing at this moment that you, like Simon Peter, are a sinner--as we all are. You might be feeling unworthy to be in God's presence, to be in God's service. And we are, or at least, we would be if our God were not gracious, loving, merciful and kind--as God is!

You can do this--we can do all things--through Christ who will strengthen us.

Come on! Let's follow him.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for raising up leaders in our congregation who are willing to take a leap of faith and work for the building of your Kingdom--right here in this community. Thank you for your many blessings to us--for being so faithful to us, though we are sinful people, who often struggle with doubts, anxiety, fatigue, and fear. Give confidence, creativity and courage to our new and continuing leaders. Help us all to be a support and encouragement for them. Lead us to pray for our leaders and this church every day. Help us to leave our old selves and old lives--everything-- behind -- to follow You. In Christ we pray. Amen.