It Is Not About The Fish

It had been a long, exhausting dark night
  • filled with fruitless exertion
    o and abundant frustrations.
  • They were men who lived by the sweat of their brow.
    o This work, by their own hands,
      ▪ was how they put food on their tables,
      ▪ it was how they provided for their families,
      ▪ and it was how they paid their bills.
  • They were good at it,
    o they were among the very best,
      ▪ on most nights their skill,
      ▪ their experience
      ▪ and their uncanny sense of intuition
        o assured their success.
  • But, on this night, their best efforts were in vain.
    o On this night all of their knowledge was useless.
      ▪ On this night everything they tried failed.

And, oh how they tried!
  • They labored the night through.
    o They gave it everything they had.
  • They were fishermen,
    o four of them working together
    o in two different boats,
      ▪ and the four of them had been at this
        • their whole lives.
  • They knew things about fish
    o that other men only hoped to learn.
  • They knew how the tides affected the fish,
    o they knew what the changing weather did to the fish,
    o they knew about what time of night
      ▪ that the fish would emerge
      ▪ from the depths of the sea
      ▪ to the shallow flats where they were easy to catch.
    o But on this night, the fish may as well have been phantoms.
      ▪ They hit their favorite deep-water haunts,
        • but there was nothing there.
      ▪ They tried the various points and channels
        • but to no avail.

Each of them had their own favorite spots and methods and they tried them all.
  • One after another, their best efforts failed them.
Finally the moon hit its highpoint,
- And that special feeding hour arrived
- They raced their boats to the sand flats,
  - believing that their luck was about to change.
- But, alas, their hope was in vain,
  - the flats were desolate,
    - the shallow waters were empty.
- They cast their nets, over and over again
  - but they never felt that familiar weight in the nets,
    - not even so much as a single fish.
- Everything they tried failed.
  - Yet they continued to press on.
    - This was their livelihood.
    - Their families depended on this.
      - This was more than just a hobby,
        - it was absolutely vital to them
        - that they catch fish.

But it was one of those odd nights
- when all of their collective knowledge, skill, and ability
  - could not rise to meet the challenge
    - of fish that simply would not be caught.
- As the horizon became streaked with the first red light of dawn,
  - as the eastern sky grew lighter and lighter,
    - they redoubled their efforts.
- They were determined not to go home empty handed.
  - They were determined to make something worthwhile of this night.
    - So, into the morning, they labored.
      - Into the next day they stayed with it.
  - Strong men, growing weaker by the hour.
    - Resolute men growing more dismayed by the minute.
      - Professional fishermen who,
        - try as they might,
          - couldn’t put a single fish into the boat.

Can you imagine their state of mind when they finally gave up?
- They were exhausted.
  - They were frustrated.
    - They were disappointed
      - and they were completely at a loss for an explanation.
- How many times do four professional fishermen,
  - take to the water and toil the whole night through
    - without catching a single fish?
- How many times does so much experience amount to so little?
  - They were, without a doubt, a disgusted, defeated, bunch of fishermen
as they finally, in exasperation,
  • turned their boats towards home.

• After succumbing to circumstances that were beyond their control,
  o after finally giving up and giving in,
    ▪ there was only one task that stood between them
      • and a hot meal
      • and some badly needed sleep.

• Their nets needed to be tended to.
  o These fishermen live and die by their nets.
    ▪ So, no matter how tired they were,
      • no matter how exhausting
      • the nights empty labor had been,
        o they would pull to the shore
          ▪ and clean and mend their nets.
    ▪ It was a job that had to be done each and every day.

As Peter and Andrew in one boat,
• and James and John in the other,
  o approached the shoreline on that fateful day,
    ▪ they must have been a little surprised
    ▪ by the crowd that was gathering there.

• At first they may not have realized what was going on
  o but, within a few moments,
  o they recognized the figure of Jesus on the seashore
    ▪ and they understood what all the excitement was about.

• Peter and his companions were religious men in their own right.
  o They were familiar with Jesus,
    ▪ they were aware of his ministry,
      • and deep within their hearts
        o they believed that he was the promised messiah,
  o but they were practical men who had to work for a living.
    ▪ Life placed its demands on them
      • and they couldn't abandon those things.

• So they worked
  o and whenever the opportunity presented itself,
    ▪ they would go to where Jesus was
      • and hear him speak.

Seeing an opportunity to perhaps have something good
• come out of this night that had gone so bad,
  o they beached their vessels within earshot of Jesus
  o and began to clean and mend their nets.

• Then everything changed.
  o Jesus came walking towards them.
    ▪ At first it seemed as if he might use the shore
right there beside where they had landed
  o as the place where he would deliver today's message.
  o But he never stopped.
    ▪ He had singled them out.
    ▪ He walked right up to where Peter and Andrew were
      o and, stepping aboard their boat,
        ▪ and asked them put back out into the water.
  • The next hour was incredible.
    o Their weariness was momentarily forgotten
      ▪ as they were enraptured by the words of Jesus.
    o Peter and Andrew watched in awe
      ▪ as this great teacher walked the deck of their boat
        ▪ and spoke words of life to the gathered multitude.
    o James and John, in the sister vessel,
      ▪ riding right alongside Peter and Andrew
        ▪ were amazed at what they heard and saw that day.

Finally, however, the teaching came to an end.
• Finally Jesus finished his message,
  o prayed over the crowd
    ▪ and gave them leave
      ▪ to go about the business of the day.
• No doubt, as the crowd dispersed,
  o Peter and John both began to turn their vessels back to the shore,
    ▪ as all of the fishermen anticipated the work
      ▪ that needed to be done
      ▪ before their bone weary bodies
        o could finally rest.
• That's when it happened.
  o Jesus looked at Peter and said, “Let's go fishing.”
• In that moment, so many things must have run through Peter's mind.
  o He is weary from a long night of fruitless effort.
    ▪ He has delayed his work
      ▪ to spend these moments with the master
        o but now the time has come
          ▪ to get back to the affairs of life.
      o After all, he's already been fishing.
        ▪ He has fished all-night and even into this morning
          ▪ with absolutely no success.
        ▪ And now the teacher wants to go fishing...

Peter's intention is to respectfully decline.
• Surely the master doesn't realize the circumstances.
o He must think we were getting ready to launch,
  ▪ not that we had just returned from a long fruitless night.
• Surely he has no idea just how impossible it is to catch fish on a day like today.
  o So Peter objects, “We’ve toiled all night long and we’ve caught nothing.”
    ▪ We’ve already been fishing.
    ▪ It was a complete bust.
    ▪ Sorry, maybe we can go some other time.
• I’m sure that there was a part of Peter that wanted to be a whole lot more blunt.
  o I’m sure that some part of him wanted to say,
    ▪ “Hey. Wait a minute.
      ▪ You’re the teacher
      ▪ and I’m the fisherman.
    ▪ I’ll leave the teaching to you,
      ▪ but you leave the fishing to me.
    ▪ This is the wrong time,
      ▪ the wrong day,
      o and the wrong place.
    ▪ Any effort to go fishing today will fail miserably.
      ▪ I mean, come on Jesus,
        o you don’t have any idea what you are asking.
    ▪ I’m a PROFESSIONAL fisherman.
      ▪ I have labored all night long.
    ▪ If I couldn’t catch a fish during the prime feeding time last night,
      ▪ There is no use in trying now
        o One more cast of the nets isn’t going to change our luck!
          ▪ Besides all of that,
          ▪ we’ve already started cleaning the nets!

But something about this Jesus compelled Peter
• to add a caveat at the end
  o of his meager attempt to say no.
• Perhaps it was something in the master’s eyes
  o or perhaps it was something in the way he spoke
    ▪ with faith and promise.
• Whatever it was, it compelled Peter to add,
  o “Nevertheless, if you insist…
    ▪ If you really want us too…
      ▪ we will.”
• You can almost hear the reluctance.
  o Surely sense will dawn on Jesus,
• surely the voice of reason will break thru.
  • Surely he will recognize
    o what a difficult thing he has asked of us.

• But Jesus doesn’t relent.
  o The invitation stands, let’s go fishing.
    • So reluctantly, as James and John look on from the other boat
      • wondering what they are doing and why,
  o Peter and Andrew gather their nets
    • for the last weary throw
      • of this miserable fishing trip.

What happened next was the stuff of legends.
• Peter and Andrew cast the net into the water.
  o They let it fall into the sea as they had done so many times before.
    • Finally, when it reached the peak of its fall,
      • they pulled together
      • to haul the empty nets back to the boat.
• Only this time they weren’t empty.
  o This time there was an unfamiliar weight on the nets.
    • Even more weight
      • than there should have been
      • for a successful cast.
  o The first reaction was probably confusion and doubt.
    • No doubt Peter thinks they have somehow ensnared
      • part of a shipwrecked boat or something
        o because the weight in the nets is too much.
  o Desperately now, they haul on the nets,
    • whatever it is, they must get free of it
      • before too much damage is done.
  o But then the strangest thing happens.
    • Fish begin to break the surface of the water.
      • There were so many fish.
        o The nets are full to overflowing.
      • The uncommon weight is the heft of an unconventional harvest.

In a moment, they go from worrying that they are hung up on some debris,
• to worrying that they can’t manage the fish they’ve caught.
  o The weight is too much for them to handle,
    • and the nets begin to break.
• They do everything that they can to spill the massive catch into their boat
  o but the multitude of fish
  o that they have hauled to the top of the water
    • is too much.
  o It threatens to sink their boat.
• Frantically Peter and Andrew called for James and John,
only to discover that the harvest was so great
  that it began to sink the second boat too.
• Desperate, the fishermen turn their boats back to the shoreline
  hoping to make landfall before it is too late.
• It was a catch like they had never experienced before.
  Heaps upon heaps of fish threatened to capsize their boats.
  As they raced towards the shore.
  • Exhaustion turned to excitement,
  • dismay turned to joy,
  • and futility gave way to success

In the midst of all the excitement, Jesus was forgotten.
• For just a moment, the messiah had become a deckhand.
  But, as soon as they made landfall,
  • as soon as the excitement began to wind down,
  • Peter realized that he needed to repent
  • for the arrogant way he had treated Jesus.
• He had made the horrible mistake of assuming
  that the knew better than Jesus did
  • and now he was ashamed of himself.
• Turning to Jesus he says:
  • “Depart from me for I am a sinful man.”
  • I’m no good Jesus,
  • you better get away from me
  • before I ruin your reputation.
• It was the honest repentance
  of a man who knew that he didn’t deserve
  the blessing that had just transpired in his life.
• The response of Jesus was amazing.
  They were words that Peter would never forget.
  • “There is nothing to fear, Peter.
  • Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men...”

**All of a sudden Peter realizes what Jesus has known all along:**
• This wasn’t about the fish.
  • This was never about the fish!

Jesus had no interest in catching fish.
• The entire episode,
  from the frustratingly fruitless night
  to the abundant overflow of fish
  • had been orchestrated by heaven.
• What had seemed like a chance encounter
  was really an appointment with destiny
  • and God had used the occasion of Peter’s own trade
  • to teach him a very important lesson.
• That day Peter’s life was transformed
  o by the realization that
    ▪ God didn’t need his talents,
    ▪ God didn’t need his knowledge,
    ▪ God didn’t need his abilities,
    ▪ **God only needed his obedience.**
• On a day when the best of his knowledge
  o wasn’t enough to catch a single fish,
    ▪ on a day when the fish would refuse to be caught,
    ▪ when they simply would not cooperate,
• Jesus demonstrated a powerful truth:
  o **When you’ve tried everything you know to try,**
    ▪ if you will trust and obey me,
      ▪ I will make you catch fish.
  o **But it was never about fishing,**
    ▪ It was about understanding the power of submission to God.
      ▪ It was about understanding the power of obedience to God.
      ▪ It was about understanding that when I yield to God,
        ▪ when I allow him to work in my life,
          ▪ he can do anything.

At the end of the day, Jesus elevates the whole experience to another level
• when he assures Peter that what he just did with the fish,
  o he will do with men.
• There’s the hidden truth in the whole story.
  o Peter was a good fisherman.
    ▪ Peter had the right tools,
    ▪ The right abilities
    ▪ and the right skills to catch fish.
  o But Peter was a poor, common, uneducated man.
    ▪ He was not equipped to become a leader among men.
    ▪ He was not equipped to become the head of a church.
    ▪ He was not equipped to become the spokesman of heaven on
      the day of Pentecost.
      ▪ He was just a humble fisherman.
  o He didn’t know anything about speaking to kings and rulers,
    ▪ about declaring the truth before courts and judges.
  o **What Jesus was demonstrating to Peter, on that day,**
    ▪ was a principle that would carry Peter
      ▪ through the rest of his life.
      ▪ **What God did with fish,**
      ▪ **he would do with men.**

Jesus was demonstrating to Peter,
• I don’t need your talents,
I don’t need your abilities,
I don’t need your skills.

Don’t get too concerned with your inadequacies,
don’t get overly caught up in your lack of education,
don’t put too much stock in your shortcomings,
  if I can use you to catch fish,
    I can use you to catch men.

You see, the truth is
that the success of that day hinged solely
    on Peter’s obedience to Jesus.
It wasn’t where he threw the net,
it wasn’t how he threw the net,
it wasn’t the kind of net that he threw,
  it was the fact
  that when Jesus said,
    cast your nets one more time,
      Peter obeyed him.

That’s the lesson!
God will use you if you will obey him.
  God will use you if you will let his spirit lead you.
It’s not about you
  and it’s not about the fish,
    it is all about Jesus.
    It is all about doing his will.
    It is all about following where he leads
      and obeying what he says.

The church exists in this world for a singular purpose.
We are here to reach the lost.
  We are here to reap a harvest of souls.
Just like Peter, God has called us to be fishers of men.
  But, all too often, we get too fixated on ourselves
    and our own inabilities
    and our own insecurities.
I want to cause you to see and understand this afternoon
  what Peter saw and understood on that day so long ago...
    It’s not about the fish.
      It’s not about whether or not they want to be caught.
      It’s not about whether or not the conditions are right.
        It is all about Jesus.
Your success or failure as a soul winner
  isn’t so much about you
  or the lost souls around you
    as it is about your obedience to Jesus Christ.
If you will learn to hear him,
to be sensitive to his spirit,

- to go where he directs you
  - and say what he leads you to say,
    - he will make you successful as a fisher of men.

- He knows where the fish are hiding
  - below the surface of the lake
    - and he knows where hungry hearts
      - are in the midst of this city.

- He knows who, in your life, is at that desperate moment
  - where they need the intervention of heaven
    - and, if we, like Peter, will yield to him
      - and allow him to direct us,
        - he will give us a harvest of souls.

The truth is, that there was no shortage of fish in the sea that day.

- Peter just didn’t know where they were.
  - All of his skill and all of his ability
    - wasn’t enough to put them in the boat.

- But one word from Jesus,
  - one instruction from the Lord
    - was all it took to position him
    - for the greatest harvest he ever had.

- There is no shortage of hurting, lonely, despairing people in your life.
  - There is no shortage of people who desperately need God.

- You just can’t see past the façade that they put on in public.
  - You can’t see behind their smile
    - into their long lonely sleepless nights.

- But Jesus knows.
  - He knows who they are.
    - He knows where they are.
      - And he knows what they need to hear.

- I am convinced that we are fruitless in our efforts to reach the lost,
  - only because we fail to submit ourselves to the direction of God.

- Jesus wants to take charge of the boat,
  - he wants to lead you to fertile waters,
    - and he wants to tell you when and where to cast the net.
      - You see, its not about the fish...
        - Its all about obeying Jesus.

What we need, more than anything else, is a fresh sensitivity to the spirit of God.

- We need to learn to hear his voice.
  - We need to learn to live lives that are submitted to him.
    - We need to learn to yield to him,
      - to allow him to guide us,
      - to allow him to direct us,
• to allow him to lead us  
  o to the harvest that is all around us!

• That’s where revival is.  
  o If you will follow Jesus,  
    ▪ he will make you into fishers of men!

• Too often we are intimidated by the prospect of outreach and evangelism.  
  o If only we could learn the lesson that Peter learned  
    ▪ it would make things so much simpler...

  • It’s not about the fish.  
  • Its not about the individual men and women in your life,  
    o It is about your obedience to Jesus Christ.

  ▪ If you will follow him,  
    • if you will obey him,  
    • if you will cast your net  
      o where he says to cast your net,  
      o revival will follow!

Close:
I once heard a man of God talk about a prayer that he prayed every day of his life.  
• He said he prayed this way:  
  o Lord, lead me to your harvest.  
    ▪ Lead me to hungry people.

• He said, by way of explanation, my harvest isn’t always the same as God’s harvest.  
  o My harvest is made up of my lost family member, my close associates, my friends and coworkers.  
  o Those people need God but they may not be ready, yet, to surrender to God.  
  o If I insist on pursuing that harvest, out of season, I may do little more than waste my time.

• But God knows where there are hurting people around me.  
  o God knows where there are people, in my life, that are desperate and ready to make a change.
  o If I will allow God to lead me to his harvest, I can reach those people with the gospel.
  o My efforts will be much more successful.

• The man was a constant soul winner,  
  o he was always reaching out  
    ▪ and his efforts were extraordinarily productive  
      • because he learned, somewhere along the way,  
      • the lesson that Jesus taught to Peter  
      • on the Sea of Galilee:  
        o Its not about the fish,  
        o its about following Jesus!
• That man of God learned
  o that if he would walk where Jesus said walk,
    ▪ if he would reach out to those people that Jesus led him to,
  • If he would say the words that Jesus put into his mouth
    o then his efforts would be productive
    o and souls would be added to the kingdom.

It has been too long since we stirred the waters of baptism.
• It has been too long since a newborn soul spoke in tongues for the very first time around these altars.
• It has been too long since you personally won a soul to God.
  o A church that is not in revival
    ▪ is a church that is not fulfilling its purpose.
• And if we aren’t having revival,
  o if we are toiling the night away
    ▪ but aren’t seeing any rewards for our labor,
• perhaps its time to change our focus
  o from all of our fruitless efforts
    ▪ and ask God to lead us to his harvest.

This afternoon I want you to realize that if Peter can catch fish on a day when the fishing is virtually impossible,
• then **God can use you to reach souls if only you will follow him.**
  o Would you pray for three things:
    ▪ A burden for the lost,
    ▪ a sensitivity to the spirit of God
    ▪ and a boldness to follow wherever he leads.
• I believe that he will give us a revival
  o if we will learn to follow him
    ▪ because I know that its not about me
    ▪ and its not about the fish,
    • its all about him!

Would you come and pray: Lord, lead me to your harvest...