

The Things We Leave Behind

Luke 5:1-11, 27-28

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Jesus has been enjoying a time of successful ministry in Galilee—teaching with authority, driving out demons, healing people, traveling from town to town preaching the good news of God’s kingdom. Other than in Nazareth, he is enjoying great popularity.

Now Jesus is by Lake Gennesaret (Luke’s name for the Sea of Galilee), somewhere near Capernaum. The people are crowding around Jesus and listening to the word of God, the good news of God’s kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming and teaching. There’s something about the way Jesus offers the Word that makes people want to listen. For one thing, Jesus preaches and teaches with an authority the people haven’t seen in their religious leaders. Here’s a preacher who actually makes sense! And rather than clubbing people over the head with the message, Jesus simply holds it up to the light and “a rainbow of color washes hope over the gray crowd” (Ken Gire, *Intimate Moments with the Savior* 29).

No wonder people crowd around to hear Jesus. But their crowding around him causes some problems. Jesus is getting jostled and pushed to the edge of the water. Looking around, he sees a couple of fishing boats with the fishermen nearby washing their nets. These were called “trammel nets” and were made of linen. The nets were visible to fish during the day, so they were used at night. It took two to four men to deploy them and they needed to be washed each morning.

One of the boats belongs to Simon. Jesus gets in it and asks Simon to push out a little way from the shore. Sitting in the boat, Jesus teaches the people who are lined up on the shore. The shoreline near Capernaum zigzags in a series of steep inlets. Each inlet forms a natural amphitheater. Still today, you could get in a boat and push out a little from shore, talk in a natural voice, and anyone on the slopes of the inlet could hear you clearly, actually more clearly than if you were standing on the shore with them (N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*).

Jesus and Simon have met before. In 4:38, Luke tells us that Jesus went to Simon's home and healed Simon's mother-in-law who was suffering from a high fever. So Simon knows something about Jesus. He has probably listened to him preach and they have visited with each other. So it's not so strange that Simon would let Jesus use his boat like this.

As Jesus teaches, Simon may continue working on his net, but he's listening to every word. What Jesus said about God's kingdom, his authority that came from his personal knowledge of the kingdom, and just the winsome way Jesus had may all intrigue Simon. There is something in Jesus that attracts him and makes him want to know more. So he listens.

After Jesus finishes speaking, he turns to Simon and says, "Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Jesus has obviously noticed that Simon doesn't have any fish this morning. But Simon calls his attention to this obvious fact: "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything."

Simon hardly realizes who this Master is or just how far-reaching this Master's authority is.

His polite objection probably masks his real thoughts: "Hey, I'm the fisherman here! Maybe you should just stick to preaching." However, having not caught anything the previous night, he may figure it can't hurt to try. So he goes on, "But *at your word*, I will let down the nets." This is a hint of the importance and effectiveness of Jesus' word. It also relates to the "word of God" the people heard from Jesus earlier.

Simon rows out into the deep water and then he and some others cast out the net. Simon knows you don't fish in daylight on Galilee—the fish come up to feed at night, and during the day in the clear water they can see and dodge the nets.

So after the net hits the water there may be a few anxious moments. Simon may feel a little awkward. He's ready to get this over and get back to shore. Not looking at Jesus or the others in the boat, he holds the rope and gazes at the water.

Then he feels a tug on the rope and another and another. Soon the rope is slipping through his hands. He gets some help and they start hauling in the net. It's full of fish! Before they can get it onto the boat, the

net starts to break. Simon is in a frantic flurry of activity now. He calls to his partners, "James! John! Get your boat over here! Help!" I can imagine Jesus smiling at all this with a playful twinkle in his eye.

When the other boat pulls alongside, the men start hauling in the fish. It's such a huge catch that the boats start to sink. The men are bailing water and rowing frantically. Except for Simon. Here's how Ken Gire describes this scene:

A jagged revelation rips through his soul and stops him in his tracks. This is no human Messiah; this Master's dominion reaches even to the depths of the sea.

He whirls around to look at Jesus, and their eyes lock. Suddenly the murky depths of [Simon's] heart are dredged to the surface. And he realizes how unworthy he is even to be in the same boat with Jesus. (32)

This miracle, this amazing catch of fish has revealed something about Jesus. He has power and authority even over creation. He is more than a simple carpenter-preacher from Nazareth. Simon sees something of the greatness and wonder of Jesus.

And this revelation of Jesus also reveals Simon's heart. Simon Peter (Luke finally uses his other name) doesn't respond like a fisherman—"Why didn't I know where the fish were?" He responds like a person in the presence of one he now calls Lord. He sashes across the boat and falls down before Jesus: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man."

When we begin to see Jesus for who he is, we start to see ourselves as we are, including our sinfulness. Simon and those with him are astonished at the catch of fish. In his sin, Simon couldn't stand to be in the presence of one who could do such a miracle and so must be especially holy.

But Jesus doesn't leave Simon to wallow in his sin. He says, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Through the amazing catch of fish, Jesus extends his first call to discipleship. The miracle shows the extent of the ministry that disciples share in. They will work with a Lord

who can bring in such a net-breaking, boat-sinking load of fish. The power Jesus has displayed will be the power at work as they follow Jesus and share in his mission.

Simon and the others pull their boats up on the shore. Then they leave everything—boats, nets, fish, business—and follow Jesus. They become disciples of this Rabbi. They will travel with him, learn from him, and be trained by him. Simon Peter the fisherman, who had used his energies trying to catch fish for a living, has now left his nets behind and has begun his life's training as one of the apostles of Jesus (Craig Evans, *NIBC: Luke 85*).

Why would he do that? What is it about Jesus that makes people want to be with him whatever the cost?

Later in this chapter, we see another call to discipleship. Jesus sees a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tollbooth. Jesus simply says to him, "Follow me." No miracle, no sign of power, no promises, no details about what discipleship will involve. But Levi gets up, leaves everything, and follows Jesus.

Levi, who is also called Matthew (Mt 9:9), may have heard Jesus preach before or seen some of the healings he had done. But the impression we get here is that there is simply something about Jesus that attracts people. He has an authority and a presence that make people want to be with him and follow him.

Something about who Jesus is and something in the way he called them to follow moved Simon and Levi and others to leave behind all that they had and all that defined who they were. They gave it up and followed Jesus. They sensed that life with him was better than anything they had known. That following him and knowing him are more important than anything they had.

Fred Craddock tells about a friend of his who ministered mostly in China. This man was under house arrest in China when the soldiers came one day and said, "You can return to America."

The family was celebrating and the soldiers said, "You can take two hundred pounds with you."

Well, they'd been there for years. Two hundred pounds. They got the scales and started the family arguments: two children, wife, husband. Must have this vase. Well, this is a new typewriter. What about my books? What about this? And they weighed everything and took some off and weighed it again and took some off and weighed it again and, finally, right on the dot, two hundred pounds.

The soldier asked, "Ready to go?"

"Yes."

"Did you weigh everything?"

"Yes."

"You weighed the kids?"

"No, we didn't."

"Weigh the kids."

And in a moment, typewriter and books and vase and all became trash. (*Craddock Stories* 22-23)

How important, really, are the things we hang on to?

When we get a glimpse of who Jesus is—of how good and powerful and wonderful and wise and loving he is—then we begin to realize that nothing compares to being with him, following him and knowing him. We are willing to be his no matter what it costs, no matter what it takes. Simon Peter and Levi Matthew left everything when they saw Jesus and heard his call. The apostle Paul said it this way:

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.... I want to know Christ. (Philippians 3:8-10)

What does it take to be a follower of Jesus? Everything.

Now, not to let us off the hook, but notice what Levi does after he leaves everything to follow Jesus. He throws a banquet in his own home for Jesus and the other disciples and many other people. How can he afford this after giving up everything?

In leaving everything, Levi was repenting and he was putting all he had at Jesus' disposal for the mission of God's kingdom. When we follow Jesus, we make ourselves and all that we have available to him, to use as he will. For some people, maybe the call is to be good stewards of what God entrusts to them instead of being greedy and selfish with it. Others may hear the call literally to give up what they own in order to serve God. It doesn't have to be possessions. It could be whatever gives us security other than God. It could be comfort. Jesus calls us from the security of the familiar to the adventure of following him into the unknown. We know that we are not our own. Our lives and possessions do not belong to us, but to our Lord. "And we can't imagine the freedom we find from the things we leave behind" (Michael Card).

Ken Gire has written a prayer that helps us respond to Jesus:

Dear Master, help me to be faithful in little things like cleaning nets, knowing that they could be your way of preparing me for greater things—like fishing for [people].

Help me to obey simply and solely "because you say so." And keep me from thinking that since I have fished a few waters that somehow I know better than you the course my life should take and the place my nets should be dropped.

Call me, Lord, out from a shallow faith near the shore, which requires no risks and offers no rewards. Call me to a deeper commitment to you.

And when you call, grant that I would be quick in my boat, swift to my oars, and fast with my nets. And I pray, grant me the eyes to see who it is who labors by my side—an awesome and almighty God.

Take me to a place where I have worked hard by my own strength and yet ended up with empty nets. Take me there to show me the depths of your dominion and the net-breaking fullness of your power.

Keep me ever aware that you are Lord. And ever aware that I am a sinful person. And in that knowledge keep me ever on my knees before you.

At your bidding, O Master, I will let down my nets. And at your bidding, I will leave them forever behind. For what you have to offer is infinitely more than all the seas of this world ever could.