

## **Jesus Calls Us**

Our New Testament reading is Luke 5:1-11, which is the call of Jesus to his disciples, his earliest followers, who were to continue with him through the three years of his public ministry. Jesus had issued an initial the call to Simon Peter, his brother, Andrew, and James to spend time with him and learn about his identity as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 31). In the setting for today’s text we hear Jesus’ call to these disciples to follow (Mk1:17).

I’ll read: **Luke 5:1-11.**

*5 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 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.*

Years ago, when I was serving a church in suburban Dayton, Ohio, I was asked by a neighbor if I would pray for his friend who was suffering from a life-threatening illness. I asked my neighbor, Steve, if his friend was a Christian and Steve replied very confidently, “Well, sure he is. He’s from Van Wert,” Steve’s hometown in Northwestern Ohio. As far as Steve knew, there were no Jews, Muslims or adherents of other world religions, and likely no atheists in Van Wert. Therefore his friend was a Christian.

The word “Christian” has lost a lot of its significance since the time it was first used to designate the followers of Jesus in the church of Antioch (Acts 11:26c). These “Christ-ones” were given this moniker because their character, behavior and mission reflected that of Jesus of Nazareth. They were similar to Christ and different from people of the world around them. But through the centuries, the name “Christian” is little more than a cultural and generically religious classification

But in reality a Christian is a disciple, one who learns by following, similar to an apprentice, who learns a trade from the master-tradesman. Jesus, just as with these first followers, now calls his disciples as he joins himself to us in a personal relationship (1-3). One of the wonders of the gospel story is its consistent demonstration of God's initiative in our salvation. We always see Jesus consistently portrayed as singling out and caring for individuals, as he does these fishermen turned disciples. As our text says, although surrounded by the multitude, Jesus saw the two boats, and then he got into one of them (3) in order to lead these fishermen into a deeper understanding of and stronger relationship with him (3).

Jesus came to these fishermen who were preoccupied with their business, which at times was profitable yet at times, as in our text, unsuccessful. Fishermen were not and probably still are not the most likely to be religious seekers. They're a sturdy sort of folks who probably had little time or use for religion, even their Jewish faith.

Years ago I was involved in the filming of a television special on the life of Jesus, and one stop for us in the Holy Land was the Jordan River, where it flows out of Lake Galilee. Being the Baptist in the team, I was appointed to give a segment on Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer. Just as we were getting ready for the filming, a group of young fishermen appeared, bringing their boat to shore with a successful catch of fish. As they unloaded the fish from the boat into the back of their truck, it was apparent how like the first followers of Jesus were these rough-hewn young fishermen. I imagined that anything except religion, deep philosophy or spirituality was on their minds and in their raucous chatter. I couldn't understand them, but there might have even been a sprinkling of profanity in their talk.

Jesus often chooses the most unlikely, as Paul says, in order to show his grace and also his great power to transform people into the likeness of his Son (1 Cor.1:26-31). As Paul told Timothy, he had been a blasphemer, persecutor and a violent man, but God changed him dramatically in order to put his mercy and grace on display (1Tim. 1:12-17).

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you," said our Lord (Jn. 15:16a. Jesus sought all of us redeemed people, not because of our deserving or our spiritual inclinations, but because of his mercy and to demonstrate in our lives his power to rescue. Jesus had a reputation of being a "friend of sinners" (Lk. 7:34). Those who had no religious claims and who realized they were lost sinners were the ones Jesus most attracted and called to follow him. In his parable about the lost sheep, Jesus spoke of the greater "rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Lk. 15:1-7).

The Good News is that God loved us, sinners though we are. And when Jesus came to these fishermen, they were in need of him. And those of us here today

who now follow him were and are in desperate need for Jesus. And this is why he came to rescue us. And in his perfect timing, whether in full adulthood or childhood, the time was right for Jesus to come to us and claim us as his own. And this was the way Jesus came into the world on his rescue mission. As Paul says, "...when *the time arrived* that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son...that he might redeem," rescue us from our lost condition (Gal. 4:4).

As Jesus said, following his successful rescue of sinner Zacchaeus, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). And he sought each one of us who claim to be his followers. He came to us at the perfect time, when an event or perhaps a friend, opened our eyes and piqued our interest in him. We may have even come to sense our desperate need for him. It was therefore not just coincidence that Jesus got into one of the fishing boats. There was also a practical reason. The crowd was so large that Jesus was crowded to the edge of the water, and he used the boat for a pulpit (3). But he chose the boat of Peter and his fishing business partners in order to join them to himself. God's word clearly shows the particular choice and love of God for us as individuals. God loves you so much, that if you were the only person alive, and you were in need of redeeming grace, Christ Jesus would die just for you.

When Jesus finished speaking to the crowd, he had a personal word for Simon Peter. And that's how God works in our lives, personally and directly, as though we were the only ones in the audience. Jesus told Simon Peter push the boat back into the deep water and throw out the fishing nets to catch fish.

It's difficult for us to appreciate the apparent senselessness of this command. Jesus was by his trade in Joseph's household a carpenter and, as far as we know, had never fished in his life. On the other hand, Peter and his business partners, Andrew, James and John, were professional fishermen. The night before, they had fished all night under the best of natural conditions and had caught nothing. In addition, the daytime was inimical to fishing because the large nets could be seen by fish in the daylight waters. And so Simon Peter replies, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything" (5a, NIV).

Whenever God's word comes to us we're faced with a crisis of faith. Jesus shows his greatness. But first we must obey him. Faith is obeying God's word, regardless of the evidence and sometimes in spite of the evidence. Faith is not irrational but it is supra rational. Salvation comes to those willing to trust the evidence God gives us and to do what he says before the confirmation. We don't try to understand in order to believe; rather, we believe in order to understand. When we take God at his word and do what he says, our minds are opened to understand and God gives us all the confirmation we need. In fact, only after we become God's children, now given his Spirit to live in us, does his word and his world begin to make sense to us. And so, like these first followers, we say to Jesus, "Yet if you say so...."

And this is only the beginning. Even after we've been follower-learners of Jesus for years, his word continues to come to us to challenge us in the next step of faith. I've discovered that life's challenges don't stop with advancing age. I'm faced my greatest tests of faith in my senior years. The Christian life is one of following Jesus day by day in simple obedience. Salvation is not a commodity you keep, like an eternal life insurance policy that guarantees you a place in heaven, regardless of how you live now. It's a daily relationship of love and trust.

In your relationship with Christ, what he asks may seem nonsensical, like net fishing in broad daylight. We are creatures of time and space and are conditioned to think practically. Even as Christians, followers of Jesus, it may seem absurd to us when Jesus commands you to do volunteer work in some needy country, for example. The word and the will of God can seem unpractical and even absurd. What Jesus expects is our obedience.

Notice the reply of Simon Peter: "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets" (5). This is the essence of faith. It's when we don't understand yet still obey. Notice, Peter called Jesus "Master." You cannot say "Master" and "no" in the same sentence. We obey and follow simply because he is Master and he says so.

When Simon Peter and his colleagues obeyed, they "caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." And with all their partners they filled two boats "so full that they began to sink" (6-7). God responded to the obedience of Simon Peter by revealing his power and his glory. We see the results that Jesus had in mind for this sign miracle of the great catch of fish (8-11). His purpose was to set the stage, as it were, for the commissioning and leading of Peter and the other disciples to follow and serve with him. Jesus prepared Simon Peter, as he would prepare us to worship him. As a result of Jesus' demonstration of his power, Peter "fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man!'" (8). When he said, "Go away from me, Lord," Peter didn't want Jesus to leave him, but was stating how unworthy he was of the Lord and that he had no claim upon his mercy.

We're not prepared to follow Jesus until we become worshipers. In fact, the very act of following Jesus is to be an act of self-giving worship and is for the purpose of leading others to worship him (Jn. 4:23). Worshiping the majesty of God, not just in corporate worship, but in our daily listening prayer and in our practicing the presence of the risen Jesus throughout our daily life, is our life calling as his followers. This worship of the risen Jesus is the source of our joy and strength and is the way we please God and find our greatest pleasure in life. Our purpose then is to lead others to worship, which is to become a fisher of people.

No doubt this seemed unreasonable, just like fishing in broad daylight after a night of futility seemed unreasonable. This call to these fishermen came at a moment of great sacrifice. Their business had been profitable, and now, with

Jesus “calling the shots,” they could succeed in the fishing business as never before. And the call to leave their boats and nets on the shore and follow Jesus had “obvious economic, vocational and social ramifications” (J Green). The grace by which we are saved is absolutely free, but it’s not cheap. To accept Jesus’ free grace and pardon from our sin demands that now we respond in loving obedience and follow him as our Lord and Master, wherever he might lead us. Our response is always, “Yet because you say so....”

In a former church, we conducted a seminar for training members to share their faith. One of our young laymen, Van Latham, decided to enroll, explaining that because Jesus said “Come follow me and I’ll make you fish for people” if he wasn’t fishing for people he must not have been following Jesus. Jesus called him to take a new direction that was for him uncomfortable. He followed saying in essence, “Yet because you say so....”

Jesus calls us to follow him, even in new and sometimes uncomfortable directions. Following Jesus we learn to love and trust him more deeply and to rest in his amazing love for us. We don’t know where he’ll lead us, even in what he’ll lead us to do today, but we can know, love and trust him. Like these first disciples, and the young layman learning to share his faith, we’re called to say, “Yet because you say so, Lord, I’ll follow you.”