

## **“Will you Follow Me?”**

**Luke 5:1-11**

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On my way to church a couple weeks ago I was listening to some worship songs and a song called “The Kingdom of Jesus” by a group called The Porter’s Gate was playing. I’d heard the song several times, but that morning I found myself really listening to the words, and I realized that that song is a great little meditation on the Kingdom of Jesus. Having been a little too preoccupied with thoughts about this world and what’s wrong with it, it did my heart good to meditate on the kingdom of Jesus and to remember that I am a citizen of that kingdom. Today and for the next few Sundays, the lectionary offers us a little collection of lessons from the Gospel of Luke, and like the song I was listening to on the way to church, these texts offer us a chance to meditate on the Kingdom of Jesus, so that’s what we’ll be doing for the next few weeks in this sermon series, *The King and the Kingdom*.

The two primary people in our Gospel text this morning are 2 biblical figures that I think a lot of us love to read about. There’s Jesus, and of course we love to read and hear about Jesus because he’s *Jesus*- the central figure in all of Scripture; God in human flesh; the embodiment of grace and truth. And then there’s Simon Peter- regular fisherman from Galilee; earnest but flawed; quick to speak and slow to listen; impulsive at times; a disciple we can relate to. In Luke chapter 5, where we are reading today, Luke is still close to the beginning of the story he is telling. He has told of Jesus’s birth and baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and by the end of Luke 4, Jesus’s teaching ministry is underway, and he is drawing the attention of crowds by casting demons out of people and healing the sick. Up until chapter 5, Jesus has been doing his ministry alone, but in chapter 5 he begins to call and form the inner circle of disciples

who would accompany him going forward. James and John are present and mentioned in the text and they are witnesses to what happens, but the focus is on Peter. It's his boat that Jesus gets into. It's Peter who has an epiphany, and Jesus speaks directly to him.

I like how this story begins with Jesus doing his thing – attracting crowds and preaching- and Peter doing his – washing his nets after a long night of fishing- and then as each is doing his thing their paths intersect. This often seems to be the place where Jesus comes to us, and speaks to us, and summons us- when we are right in the middle of doing our regular, unexotic, ordinary things. I sometimes imagine that I will have my greatest epiphany in 20 minutes of silent, focused prayer, but, in reality, I sometimes seem to hear God's voice most clearly in the midst of a hard moment of parenting or at some other time when I'm not feeling especially "spiritual" and when I'm least expecting it. Peter might have been feeling prayerful or spiritual, but he was probably just tired and wanted to get the boat cleaned up so he could go eat something and get some rest and *this* was the moment when Jesus approached Peter and needed his help.

When Jesus got into Peter's boat, it wasn't the first time that he'd seen or heard of Jesus. In Luke 4 we're told that Jesus had visited Simon's house and that he had healed Simon's mother-in-law from an illness so Peter had already seen and heard things from Jesus that showed he had some kind of special authority and power. He knew enough to know that even though he had already been out without catching anything, that if Jesus was telling him to cast his nets again, he should just do it, and of course when he did, something miraculous happened. Fish that he didn't think would be there, more fish than he could imagine catching, more fish than he could haul in without help, so many fish that the weight of them was causing the boats to sink overwhelmed them, and right away Peter perceived that he had witnessed the power of God. In a moment reminiscent of the one Isaiah experienced, he was instantly humbled. "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man," he says to Jesus.

At this point in the story, my mind does go back to the miracle that Peter had witnessed previously when Jesus had healed his mother-in-law. I would think that he must have been amazed by Jesus's power at that time, too, but now, a *second* time, Peter is given a revelation. A special gift and grace delivered to Peter personally by Jesus. It is humbling to think that God who has a whole universe to run, and a world full of problems to sort out and prayers to hear and answer would ever take the time to address us, or do a miracle, or call us in such a personal way, isn't it? We sometimes struggle to believe it. / sometimes struggle to believe it, yet again and again, Jesus does this very thing. He shows up in some unmistakable way when someone least expects it. He gives a clear sign, or answers a prayer in an overwhelmingly obvious way, or impresses a message on someone's heart that is undeniably God's word and not some stray or random thought or idea. Jesus does come to us and gives grace to us in very personal ways just like he did for Peter here, and he does it even if we are, or think we are, unworthy of it. We don't have any reason to think that Peter's assessment of himself was incorrect when he admitted to being a sinful man. He was, like all of us, imperfect and hadn't done anything to deserve the gift of this unique miracle or to receive any kind of special calling from Jesus, yet his limitations, and his sins and unsavory parts didn't disqualify him from having this deeply personal encounter with Jesus or from receiving amazing grace. Neither do ours.

Still, when Peter saw the great catch, he *did* feel unworthy of being in the presence of the holiness and power of Jesus, but Jesus looked at him and proclaimed good news. He said, "Don't be afraid. From now on you'll be catching people." We hear that, and I think we know what it means. Jesus was telling Peter that he would bring others to Jesus who would also learn to love and trust him, and that's true, but those were profound and life-changing words. Jesus was saying that Peter's life was going to be completely transformed. He would still be Peter, and he would still be a fisherman by trade. He

would still do all of the mundane earthly things that we all do- eat, drink, sleep, get in a bad mood – but now he was going to have a major part in this glorious thing that God was doing to heal and transform the world. In his moment of surrender to Jesus, he had entered into Jesus’s Kingdom and going forward he would have a part in teaching others about Jesus’s kingdom and in inviting and bringing others into it. *Many* others. And he was going to see and experience and do things do things that he never would have imagined seeing or doing at that point. He would witness the bodily resurrection of Jesus! He would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and preach to thousands! He would heal a lame beggar through the power of Jesus! Peter had no idea what God really had in store for his life when Jesus told him that he would be a fisher of men from that day on, but he had already done on that day what would enable him to discover it. He had taken a leap of faith and trusted Jesus.

Jesus had instructed Peter to go out to where the water was deep and cast his nets. Proverbs 3:5 reminds us to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” It’s hard for me to imagine that Peter wasn’t at least tempted to lean on his own understanding when Jesus told him to go out again and cast his nets in the deep water. For what? He had been out all night already and caught nothing. Jesus might have been a good preacher, but why should he take instruction from a *preacher* about fishing? What could possibly be the point of going back out where it was deep? These things may have run through his mind, but Peter did it anyway. He didn’t know why, or what the point was, or what would happen, but when he took that step of faith and went out where it was deep, that’s when everything changed.

That’s when he witnessed a miracle! That’s when he perceived the glory of Jesus and saw that Jesus’s response to his own unworthiness was amazing love, and mercy, and grace. That’s when Jesus revealed God’s divine purpose and plans for Peter’s life.

Peter's story is Peter's story, but in his story we hear the good news that is for all of us. In Psalm 139 the Psalmist proclaims, "you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" Not one person who is hearing these words is an accident. You were made on purpose by God who loves you and knows everything about you and despite anything that might make us feel like we are unworthy of a personal encounter with Jesus, or unworthy to receive a special grace that is just for us, God says we are worthy because God loves us. And not only are we loved, but Jesus came to transform our lives in the same way that he transformed Peter's. No matter who we are, he offers us the opportunity to have our lives infused with his life and the power of the Holy Spirit, and when it is, it becomes possible to see things we've never seen, and do things we've never done, and to be involved in bringing God's kingdom to earth in ways we can't even imagine. That is the good news, but there is also the challenge.

All of this is available to each and every one of us. God has made it all available to us through and in Christ, but, like Peter, we have to be willing to take that step of faith- to surrender and submit to Jesus and follow him. This is how we enter and become a part of the Kingdom of Jesus. There's no complicated application process that we have to go through. It's simple, yet there are always alternatives to the Kingdom that we can choose and those options do have their appeal. Peter might have put his physical hunger and weariness ahead of following Jesus in that moment. He might have thought about the life he was going to build for himself as a successful fisherman and chosen to cling to his possessions and his security instead of leaving it all to follow Jesus. He could have chosen the other things on that day and if he had, he would have missed the miracle and that profound and life-changing encounter with Jesus. That's not to say that Jesus wouldn't have given him another chance later, but at best he would have delayed the grace that Jesus offered, and at worst, if he had never come around to

taking a step of faith after Jesus, he might have forfeited the grace that Jesus offered altogether. Whether it's the first step of faith, or the ten thousandth, we have to take the steps, and it's not easy! It's not easy because we don't want to do something that seems pointless to us, like looking for fish in a place where we think we know there aren't any. Or we are unwilling to put aside what we think we know about things and humble ourselves enough to trust and learn from Jesus. It is not always easy to trust and obey, but it's when we do that we are set free to experience and embrace the life and the purpose and the joy and the transformation that Jesus wants to give to all of us.

Life in the Kingdom is available to all of us, and the good, purposeful life that Jesus offers to all of us awaits us there. Know that Jesus wants you to be part of it. Hear his invitation. Trust his love for you. Trust his wisdom. Trust his promises and follow him. Amen.