

# A Good Fishing Story

Luke 5:1-11  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
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Heard any good fishing stories lately? Did I ever tell you about the one I caught in my pond that was t h i s b i g? How about the time getting into a boat and putting out to deep water and hauling in so many fish that friends had to be called in to help? Well, the first story is true – it was a 12" largemouth bass. The second is actually one of many fishing stories that can be found in the Bible. And whether you believe in miraculous catches of fish or not, there is a lot to learn from the story we just heard from Luke 5 if we look below the water line.

On the surface, we have a story telling us that near the very beginning of Jesus' ministry such a large crowd comes out to see him at the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee (Luke uses another name, the lake of Gennesaret) that Jesus gets into a boat and puts out a little way from the shore so that he can be heard and seen by the entire crowd. The owner of the boat happens to be a fisherman named Simon, who later in this same story is called Simon Peter. Though Simon and his fishing buddies were already cleaning their nets after a disappointing night of catching no fish, Jesus tells Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets for a catch. We're talking about a professional fisherman here, so I can only imagine what his first reaction must have been. But for some reason he decides to trust this itinerate preacher and teacher named Jesus.

The result is that so many fish were caught that Simon has to call in his fishing partners in the other boat to come and help. When both boats were filled to the point that they began to sink, Simon Peter became deeply humbled. So much so that Jesus responds, "Do not be afraid." This is a common biblical phrase by those representing the Presence of God – an epiphany moment, if you will. Then comes the shocking end to this fishing story. When Jesus tells the fishermen, which now include brothers James and John, that from now on they will be catching people, not fish, they surprisingly left everything and followed Jesus.

That's one heck of a fishing story. But it's even more amazing when looked through the lens of its purpose for the gospel writer, and how this becomes not just a story that happened once upon a time, but happens all the time, to this very day, to you and me. **For Luke, this story is about discipleship, about being called to ministry and service, and about how you and I decide to respond.**

From a literary perspective, this is classified as a "call" story. There are many, many such stories in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. The other biblical passage that we heard this morning, from Isaiah 6, is also a "call" story. It has inspired some very popular hymns, such as our Hymn of Praise this morning, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, and our Hymn of Response that we will sing in just a moment, *Here I Am, Lord*. You and I, however, are neither Isaiah, a great prophet, nor Peter, a great apostle. Or are we? I want to present **three observations** that can be made in regard to our calling into discipleship – which can be defined as following the ways and teachings of Jesus.

**First, the fishermen had done nothing to warrant or merit Jesus' call to them.**

Regardless of what Jesus may have seen in them, to contend that he called the most capable or most qualified to be his disciples would contradict an important element in the Gospel narrative. The fishermen had no training for this new line of work. They were ordinary working folks. We have no indication that they were called because of their qualifications, character, or even potential. In fact, both Isaiah's and Simon Peter's initial reaction was an overwhelming feeling of being unworthy, to the point of acknowledging their own sinfulness.

It's comforting to know that we don't have to possess the 'right stuff,' like a perfect life or expert biblical knowledge, before God can use us to further God's realm and kin-dom in our midst. Remember the mantra: **God doesn't call those who are empowered, God empowers those who are called.**

**Second**, the call to discipleship did not come in a holy place, like the temple or a synagogue, but in the midst of the fishermen's daily work. This point is significant because it is a further sign of the ordinary work of God's realm, Jesus' new community, that reaches into the arena of everyday human life. **God comes to us, and calls to us, in the midst of the ordinariness of our everyday lives.** The ministry begun by Jesus, therefore, involves us wherever we find ourselves, and at whatever we are doing. Discipleship is everywhere, all the time, not just a Sunday morning kind of thing.

And that leads us to the **third** point, that **the call to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus may actually require a change in our priorities and a reordering of our commitments.** We're told that the first disciples made the dramatic decision to leave everything and followed Jesus. While it's understandable that we don't like to be told what our priorities should be and how we should live our lives, it is true that at one level serving God in our daily lives does require a commitment on our part, and at another level, it may require a change in some of our priorities.

I love the part of story in Isaiah 6 in which Isaiah, in a vision, overhears God asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Have there not been times and circumstances pop up now and again in your own life when you sensed being asked that same question? A lot of times we may hope that someone else will raise their hand and volunteer to answer the call. God, send someone else, I'm busy. Send someone else, I'm not qualified. Send someone else, it's not my job. Perhaps we, like so many biblical characters, are afraid. Yet other times we, like Isaiah, may gather the courage to respond, "Here am I, send me."

In years past when I've preached on this text from Luke, I've tended to jump over the calling to discipleship part of the story and emphasized, instead, the part about catching people. While there is indeed an element of **evangelism**, as in sharing the good news and inviting others to join in, this fishing story isn't ultimately about issues around **church growth**. It's too narrow of an interpretation to think this story is about the size of a congregation. **No, this story is primarily about how we choose to respond to what we perceive and discern God is calling us to be and do.**

Our congregation's Mission Statement, again this week printed on the front of the worship bulletin, is currently our best understanding of our calling as a community of faith. We must never forget, however, that the call comes not just to us as a congregation, but also to each one of us as individuals. Therefore, like Isaiah and Simon Peter, it is up to each one of us how to respond to our calling. And remember, part of our understanding of baptism is that we have *all* been called to service.

It is here that this fishing story can continue to be instructive. Where is it that Jesus tells Simon Peter to go to catch fish? Jesus says, "**Put out into the deep water.**" Luke meant this to have a metaphorical meaning beyond its literal understanding. What does it mean for you and I, for us as a community of faith, to head out into deep water? **Deep water means moving beyond the safety, security, familiarity, and comfort of the shallow water near the shoreline. Perhaps the Spirit of God is calling you right now to leave the shallow places in your life and head out to explore the depths.**

**Yes, there is risk in leaving what is familiar and comfortable, and I would add, traditional. It takes trust and courage to go just a little bit deeper, to where things aren't so certain, to where we can't see what lies beneath, to where things are going to be different.** What deeper water are you being called to explore? What deeper water is College Hill being called to venture into? Like that miraculous catch of fish, **what abundance might be waiting** if you and I were to risk heading out from the shallow end into deeper uncharted territory, and there let down our nets?

And notice that Simon Peter couldn't do it all by himself. He had to call his friends, his partners, to help. We learn **we need to share the labor, so that our nets don't break and our boat doesn't sink.** This catching of people, especially when it's out in deep water, is something we do together, in community.

Here I am, Lord. Send me.

Here we are, Lord. Send us.

Amen.