

# YET ANOTHER FISH STORY!

Sermon, January 28, 2018

Annual Meeting Sunday

Text: Luke 5:1-11

Someone has said the only question about the reliability of the Gospel accounts is that many of the stories were told by fishermen ... who are famous for their creativity. At least four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. The Zebedee brothers James and John, and the Jonah brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew (*it's a point I failed to make last week when we looked at the story of Jonah; apparently, this fishing family may have had as their ancestral namesake the prophet Jonah ... see Matthew 16:17, when Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah ..."*). Last week we read from Mark's gospel about these brothers leaving their boats behind to follow Jesus. Two weeks ago we read part of John's account of how Andrew and Simon met Jesus. Matthew has his account in Matthew 4 (*which we won't be looking at anytime soon*), and today we read Luke's detailed account of the call to these first disciples.

In Luke's account, Simon Peter had worked hard all night, and had come up with nothing but empty nets (*his brother Andrew isn't mentioned by name here, but we know they were partners as well as brothers so he most likely was among the unnamed companions mentioned in this account. We also know this isn't the first time Simon met Jesus; see the previous chapter in Luke*). You know, this wasn't just sport fishing; for them, fishing wasn't just a recreational distraction or an excuse to escape responsibilities for awhile. I like the story about the little boy who came to Sunday School late. He was usually very prompt so his teacher asked if anything was wrong. The boy replied no, nothing was wrong, it's just that he was planning to go fishing, but his dad told him he needed to go to church. The teacher was very impressed and asked if his dad had explained to him why it was more important to go to church than to go fishing. "Yes he did," said the boy. "He said he didn't have enough bait for both of us." For Simon and Andrew, fishing wasn't a Sunday morning pastime or any other recreational pursuit; fishing is their *work*, this is what they did, this was their profession. And they had worked hard all night doing the best they knew how at what they were supposed to be **good** at, and came up empty. This was **WHAT THEY DID**, and it wasn't working for them.

Most of us know what that's like. There isn't a person here this morning who doesn't know the frustration of working hard, doing the best you know how at something you're supposed to be good at, and having little or nothing to show for it in the end. You pour your heart and soul into doing what you do, the best you know how to do, either on the job, as a parent, a spouse, a student, and you just come up empty ... and you're tired, and frustrated, you've worked so hard and feel you've accomplished nothing. When we've looked at this before, I mentioned I like to call this feeling the "Empty **NETS** Syndrome."

We have all heard of the Empty **NEST** Syndrome ... that's the clinical term for the vague, and at times crippling, feeling of uselessness and even depression some parents have after the children are grown and gone. It's like: "*Now what do I do?*" What do you do with all those parenting skills gained from nearly two decades of feeding, clothing, chauffeuring, caring, nursing, encouraging, refereeing, scolding, advising, loving, teaching? What do you do now with all this ... quiet? You parents with small children at home know what it's like to have your days just so full, too full, with the unbelievable time and energy it takes to care for the huge needs of small children. You look at childless people almost with a sense of bemusement when they talk about how "busy" they are ... I know; I've been there! I can still vividly remember what it was like as a solo parent of three active small children, thinking I almost needed a sitter just so I could go down the driveway to get the mail! And one day, suddenly, that's all ... gone. It stops. The quiet is almost deafening! Where did those years go? Some parents have real difficulty dealing with all that, so much so that psychology came up with the clinical designation of Empty Nest Syndrome. Well, in today's reading Peter and his companions are feeling the Empty **NETS** Syndrome, a similarly useless feeling, a feeling you can get when you pour your heart and soul and all you have into doing what you do, conscientiously doing what's best and/or the best you know how ... you're knocking yourself out as a worker, as a parent, as a spouse, as a friend trying to help, and you're just coming up ... empty. And you may be beginning to wonder, "*Why bother?*"

So that's the context. About the time Peter and his tired, probably-frustrated companions get their nets all cleaned, Jesus shows up on shore with a huge crowd of people around Him, and He asks to use Peter's boat as a pulpit. Peter is happy to oblige, probably feeling that he might as well put the boat to some productive use after that wasted night. Jesus sits on the boat, Peter pulls it out from the shore a bit which provides something of a natural amphitheater so all the crowd can see and hear, Jesus gives a nice sermon, and then says to Peter, "*Now, let's go fishing. Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for another catch.*" Perhaps it's reading a bit much into

Peter's initial response, but imagine him responding, in so many words, "Master, you are a good preacher, you know your stuff about religion, but I know fishing. We've been at it all night, and I'm telling you we're not going to catch anything."

Like Peter, we all have some area of life where we are the expert, an area where we have experience and know-how, an area where we have worked hard. That area can sometimes be the hardest place for us to take any advice from Jesus. Sure, we believe Jesus is in control when it comes to religious things or church things like Sunday School and circles and youth fellowships. But when it comes to something we know about, like working in *our* profession, like taking care of *our* children, like choosing our lifestyles, or whatever else it might be that we see as our *real* world, and we hear this directive talk from Jesus about what we should do *there*? What does He know about \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)? Does Jesus really understand how things work in my world, in my work, in my home? Like Peter, we respond, "That's just not how it works in our world today, Jesus. We've been at this a long time, and we're telling you, this is how it is." But Jesus wants us to do more than just sit by the shore and listen to His eloquent words on Sunday. When the worship service is over, He wants to go on with us into our work, into our homes, into our boats, into our lives. As someone put it, "If Jesus is not Lord of all, then Jesus is not your Lord at all."<sup>1</sup>

Peter protests at first, but then says, "But, because you say so Jesus, I'll let down the nets again." "But because you say so, Jesus." That little phrase is the essence of genuine faith. "But, because you say so, Jesus, I'll try again. I don't know how this is going to work, everybody else says that's not the way things should be, it may be contrary to what my experience tells me, but because you say so, I will do what you ask. Jesus, I've done all I can do. I don't see how this can still work. But because you say so, I'll try it again. Because you say so, I'll keep playing honorably by the rules; because you say so, I'll keep reaching out in love to my neighbor, my family, my coworker; because you say so, I'll keep working honestly and diligently; I'll keep abiding by my commitments." I would venture to say that it is only when we get to "Because you say so, I will do it" that we make the immense discovery of the reality and true power of Jesus Christ. Peter and his partners go on to do what Jesus says; they cast the nets, simply because Jesus had said so. Now, it's a lot of work to clean nets only to get them all "seaweeded" again; they're tired; they've been at it all night, and the Empty Nets Syndrome may be kicking in and they may be thinking, "What's the point?" But they did so. They cast the nets, as Jesus requested. And they caught so many fish their nets began to break and their boats began to sink!

Note: They respond to Jesus' directive *to take Him with them* into the deep waters of their everyday lives, **and** they obey Him there. When they did so, they were richly blessed and they saw this Jesus whom they thought they knew in an entirely new way, and then they respond accordingly and appropriately. Note Peter didn't say, "Hey, join us, we could use a fishing partner like you!" No. Jesus is never to be a partner in the business; He is the Boss. Nor is Jesus ever to be used as just some gimmick to get more fish into our boats ... He is not a means to an end; He *is* the end. We read "... when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees." Peter didn't understand all there was to know about Jesus, but he knew enough to know Jesus should be worshipped and honored as well as obeyed. He responded the best he could to what he now understood about Jesus.

After Peter and the others see Jesus in this whole new way, and respond accordingly, they are given a divine calling, a divine purpose for their lives. "Do not be afraid," says Jesus, "from now on you will catch men." As mentioned last week,<sup>2</sup> there is something of a nuance in the Greek text found only here in Luke; this word translated "Catch" can also be translated "to save alive, to rescue, to restore to life, to revive."<sup>3</sup> Usually fishermen catch fish to kill and eat them, but disciples of Jesus are not called to do that with people! Fishers of men are called to take alive and rescue, to restore to life, to revive. To catch in this sense is to *rescue*, to catch people from falling into harm and/or to save and salvage and rescue and redeem people who have fallen into harm. All around us people are falling into all kinds of difficulties, becoming so much less than they could be. And "catchers of men" are called by Jesus to be there to tell them it doesn't have to be like that! That's your calling, Peter, Andrew, James, John. And on this Annual Meeting Sunday, it's good to be reminded of the true business of the church ... that this is our calling, as well.

This isn't just another fish story, it's a high and holy calling that begins with a new vision of this Savior we thought we knew, a calling that begins with a fresh understanding of just who Jesus is, which comes by allowing Him to be a part of our everyday lives, and going on to obey Him right where we live and work.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a quote first attributed to S. M. Zwemer in his book *The Solitary Throne* (London:Pickering and Inglis, c. 1937) – "Unless Jesus is Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all."

<sup>2</sup> See <https://greenwoodchurch.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/the-original-fish-fisher.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://biblehub.com/greek/2221.htm> and <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=zwgre/w>