

February 9th, 2025

Luke 5:1-11 “Catch of the Day”

Tell me if this sounds like a familiar scenario. Let's say you have a project you're working on that takes a lot of preparation. For the sake of illustration, let's say that your project is to wash and detail your vehicle. First you've got to gather up buckets, various sponges, soap, wax, brushes, microfiber cloths, a shop vac, Armor All, window cleaner, Rain-X - all that stuff. And I know, some of you may be thinking, “I don't know about you, but if I run my car through the local car wash twice a year, I consider myself ahead of the game!” Again, this is for the sake of illustration and it's the first thing I thought of. Anyway, you get your bucket and measure out your soap. You make sure you have the right nozzle on your hose. You have everything you need laid out so that you can get the job done quickly and efficiently because this could take all afternoon. You start working on the inside of your truck so you don't get it wet later. You throw out the trash, dust and vacuum everything down, use little brushes to get all the crumbs out of the nooks and crannies. You use Windex on the windows, spray the dash down with Armor All. Take the floor mats out to wash them. Then it's time to wash the outside. Of course after you do this, you use a chamois to get rid of the water spots so you can wax it. Then you finish the job with the tire shine spray and boom. Clean vehicle. When it's finished you spend the next fifteen minutes getting everything sorted and put away. Now it's time to take your shoes off, grab a book and go lay down in the hammock. Right as you open your book, someone walks in and says, “Oh, I see you washed your vehicle! Can you wash mine too?” Perhaps Simon Peter had the same feeling when Jesus came by and said, “Hey, could you take me out on your boat so I can speak to this crowd?”

I don't know, maybe that's not a fair illustration. Maybe the better illustration is when you've had a tough day at work where nothing went right. You had way too many things on your to-do list, and you didn't get any of them done because all day you had to deal with people putting new things on your to-do list. You didn't get a lunch break. And to top it

all off, your check engine light starts blinking and you hear a funny squeaking noise as your lights begin to dim. Then when you barely make it home before your battery dies, someone says, “Oh hey, honey, what’s for dinner?” That’s probably closer to what Simon Peter felt because he had been fishing all night and caught *nothing*. And we’re not talking about recreational fishing. Simon Peter’s livelihood depended on fishing. If a commercial fisherman comes home with nothing but sticks and seaweed in their nets, it has a huge impact on their life. So here comes this guy who just climbs into Peter’s boat and asks him to take him out on the lake because the acoustics are better out there.

That’s what was happening here on the shores of Lake Gennesaret. Now, the nice thing is that Luke makes it clear that Jesus *asked* Simon Peter. He didn’t command him. There was nothing in this story about Simon Peter saying, “Look, Jesus, I’ve been out on this boat all night and I’m tired. Couldn’t you go over to that boat and see if James or John can take you out?” But Peter willingly did as Jesus asked. Who knows, maybe he rolled his eyes. I know I would have.

By this point in Jesus’s ministry, he was a well-known public figure in that region. Remember back in chapter 4 Luke wrote, “Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.” And a little later Luke wrote, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.” That means Jesus was kind of a celebrity which is maybe why Simon did as he asked.

When he was out on the water Jesus spoke to the crowds, but Luke doesn’t mention what the subject of Jesus’ lesson was. After Jesus was done, he turned to Simon and said, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon couldn’t hold it in any longer. “Master,” he said, “we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” Now this is where things get interesting. Luke writes, “When they had done this, they

caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.” And before you say, “That doesn’t sound very helpful at all,” let me remind you that the gospel writers are famous for emphasizing abundance to the point of overstatement. Like, Jesus fed five *thousand* people with five loaves and two fish and there were *leftovers*! At the wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into *180 gallons* of high quality of wine. (I failed to mention the other week how many people it would take to consume 180 gallons of wine.) In the book of Acts, Luke writes that in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost “about *three thousand persons* were added” to the church after Peter preached to a crowd that gathered. That’s what this story that we have in front of this morning is about – *abundance*. When Jesus does something, he does it *big*. There’s *always* more than enough for *everyone*. There’s always more than enough food. There’s more than enough grace. There’s more than enough forgiveness. And it is a given that there’s always more than enough love. It’s overwhelming.

How overwhelming? So much that Simon Peter fell at Jesus’ feet and said, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Why would he react like that? Could it be that he was a little embarrassed about his lack of faith? “Okay, I’ll cast my nets out on the water, but only because *you* said so, Jesus.” Or maybe he was just overwhelmed by having this famous teacher perform a miracle that benefited him so much personally. Remember, Simon Peter was a professional fisherman. This abundant catch would be a *huge* material benefit not only to him but for James and John who owned the other boat that went out to bring the fish to shore. Jesus told him, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” When they brought their boats to shore, Simon Peter, James, and John left everything and followed Jesus. So much for cashing in on the catch of the day. They dropped everything they had to catch people!

Now here’s where we need to stop and talk about what’s going on here. There are two lessons in this story. The first is, Jesus’ miracle was all about showing the breadth and depth of God’s abundance. The second is

what Jesus meant when he said, “I will make you fishers of people.” Let’s tackle that one first. “I will make you fishers of people” is a phrase that has been used as a call to evangelism to go out into the world and use the inescapable net of the gospel to “catch” as many people as possible. But the church has often used this story to justify journeying out into the world to “catch” people by disrespecting the *others’* cultures, languages, and beliefs to turn them into nice law-abiding Christians that look, dress, think, and act just like us. Think of how many indigenous cultures have been subjugated and decimated by such a narrow and limited understanding of what this story from Luke’s gospel is even about. Of course, it’s obvious that this story is about abundance, but let’s look at how abundance factors into this idea that we are to be “fishers of people.”

First of all, it’s clear that many churches don’t have a clue about God’s understanding of abundance. Some have warped it into what sociologists call the “Prosperity Gospel.” This is the belief that financial blessing and physical well-being are *always* the will of God, and that faith, positive thinking, and donations to religious causes will increase one’s material wealth. Simply put - God rewards only the faithful. This belief tends to blame the poor for their lack of *faith* rather than recognize the barriers that those in power impose on them. Then there’s the myth of scarcity which tells people in power to accumulate, take and dominate. Why? Because they want *you* to believe that there’s *not* enough. That’s an attitude of scarcity. This story in Luke is all about having an attitude of abundance. Simon Peter falls at Jesus’ feet in sorrow because he was ashamed that he had an attitude of scarcity. “Fine, Jesus, I’ll throw this net out because you say so, but I know it’s going to be a futile effort.” When decisions are made out of the fear and anxiety that there isn’t enough, it often leads to war, injustice and inequality. It requires keeping others down so the dominant tribe can stay on top. It requires stockpiling money and food and comforts at the expense of “the other.” Oh, come on pastor. You’re exaggerating. Am I? Must I remind you that we hoarded toilet paper and hand sanitizer during a global pandemic? It’s not in our nature to have an attitude of abundance. Our primitive lizard brains are

programmed to survive at all costs. The problem, though, is that we're humans made in the image of God. God doesn't want us to succumb to our lizard brains. God wants us to use our God-given intellect to realize, "We don't have to grasp, hoard, and compete to survive – there is enough for everyone." Enough what? Enough of everything we need to not just survive, but to thrive.

The writings and teachings of the Old and New Testaments are all about overcoming our primitive programming so we can be in alignment with God. The good news of Jesus encourages us to overcome this attitude of scarcity and practice an attitude of abundance. Most of Jesus' teachings were illustrations about how radically different the kingdom of God is from the kingdoms of the earth. In God's kingdom, there's no need to hoard your resources so you can "win" the game of life. It's about trusting in God's abundance. And I'm not talking about the "prosperity Gospel" version of abundance. I'm not talking about, "God only blesses those who pray the hardest and obey the rules the best." I'm talking about, "God has already provided us with enough and we should be willing to share our abundance when times are tough." It's the ability to say, "I know things are tight, but can we not offer generosity to those around us – even those who aren't like us?"

It's sad that some churches have co-opted and "baptized" this tired old notion that we need to grasp, hoard and compete for resources. It's sad when churches subscribe to the idea that the biggest indicator that God loves you is when you have the most "stuff." For Peter, James, and John to abandon their "catch of the day" so they could follow Jesus took a lot of faith. It took courage to abandon their sinful programming to embrace an attitude of abundance. May we too be willing to set aside our attitude of scarcity and cast a net that gathers people into God's abundance.