

## GONE FISHIN'

Luke 5:1-11

Almost everyone loves a good fishing story. How do I know this? I found numerous sermon illustrations on this topic. They are not long, so I thought we would start our day with a bit of fishin' tales!!

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing on Loch Ness. Suddenly his boat was attacked by the legendary monster. In one easy flip the beast tossed the man and his boat high into air. Then it opened its mouth to swallow both. As the man tumbled head over heels in the air, he cried out, "Oh my God! Help me!" At once the ferocious attack froze in place. Time stood still with the atheist suspended in midair. Then a booming voice came down from the clouds: "I thought you didn't believe in Me!" "Come on God, give me a break!" the man pleaded. "Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!"

Then, there was an old-timer who sat on the riverbank, obviously awaiting a nibble, though the fishing season had not officially opened, but he was not willing or quite ready to confess. A uniformed officer stood behind him quietly for several minutes. "You the game warden?" the old-timer inquired. "Yup." Unruffled, the old man began to move the fishing pole from side to side. Finally, he lifted the line out of the water. Pointing to a minnow wriggling on the end of the line, he said, "Just teaching him how to swim."

Finally, a fellow had been away fishing all day and had no luck. Not wanting to go home skunked, he stopped off at a local fish shop and asked the storekeeper to pick out three of the largest trout that he had. "Shall I wrap them for you?" asked the fishmonger. "No," replied the fisherman. "I'll stand here by the door, and you throw them to me from behind the counter." "Why in the world do you want me to throw them to you?" asked the shopkeeper. "Well," said the fisherman, "I've been fishing all day, and I haven't caught a thing. Now I may not be a good fisherman, but I'm a worse liar. And when I get home, my wife and kids are going to ask me if I caught anything . . . and I want to be able to tell them the truth."

How many of us here this morning like to fish? Now how many of us would rather watch paint dry? I think I have probably gone fishin' perhaps twice in my lifetime. Both times it seemed like a huge waste of time to sit in one spot, my line dangling in the pond waiting for a hungry fish to come along. I had much more fun feeding fish stale bread!

This morning we heard the classic fish story to end all fish stories. Jesus was preaching to the crowds along the shore line and as the crowd grew it kept pressing closer and closer to him. Noticing two empty fishing boats Jesus boards one for some much needed personal space. When he is finished preaching, Jesus asks Simon Peter to row the boat out farther from the shore and drop the nets into the deep water. Instead of complying with Jesus' directive, Simon informs Jesus that would be a waste of time since they had fished those very waters all night and caught nothing.

“But, if you say so, I’ll drop the nets.” You can almost hear the unspoken, “we are going to come up empty again!”

Have you ever found yourself shaking your head and rolling your eyes when someone totally misses the obvious? Come to think of it, there was a 5 year old little girl in my first appointment who needed to set me straight one Easter Sunday morning. During Advent I had made a big deal about baby Jesus coming at Christmas. Each Sunday we moved a little further on the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem where we celebrated the birth of baby Jesus in the manger. Now it is Easter Sunday morning. In less than three months, Jesus had grown up, been in ministry for three years, had been arrested, and was put to death on the cross, and is laid in the tomb. Easter Sunday arrives, and during the children’s time we reenacted the discovery of the empty tomb with the children. The girls ran to the tomb, no Jesus. They ran back to get the boys telling them, Jesus is gone! Finally, we all end up back at the tomb. I kept asking the kids, “Where is Jesus???” Finally, after two or three times, 5 year-old Meghan puts on hand on her hip and with great disgust tells me, “He’s in the manger!”

Here are some other examples from Captain Obvious, signs like the following; “Wet when raining”, “Caution, trees don’t move”, and finally, “The library will be closed until opening hours!”.

Well apparently, the obvious needs to be restated today, and the church is no exception. Tucked inside today's gospel lesson is a declaration of the obvious that the church has lost sight of lately.

In Luke's gospel, Simon has evidently been a groupie, an interested bystander, watching and listening to Jesus as he preached in Galilee. Now, suddenly he becomes a central part of this Galilean ministry. First, Jesus uses Simon and his boat to create a safe and satisfactory place from which to preach, a service Simon is happy to provide. But then, Jesus uses Simon and his boat in a demonstration of divine power and authority. When Jesus causes the nets on Simon's boat to fill with fish, almost to the breaking point, Simon suddenly realizes this is not just a gifted speaker or a talented teacher that he has welcomed aboard. Keenly aware of the eternal gulf separating himself and Jesus, he cries out the obvious to Jesus: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"! (Luke 5:8)

Now there's a confession one doesn't hear very often anymore. It doesn't get much simpler than that. Even when we are trying to live committed, faithful Christian lives, we need to be reminded that we are both saints and sinners. Recognizing that Jesus was far above him Simon is starkly reminded of his own human condition. There are so many "fuzzy" areas in our everyday living today that people are longing for the freshness and straightforwardness of a direct answer. This passage from Luke has numerous obvious marks about following Christ that it seems to have gotten lost or forgotten in what it means to be a Christian. When was the last time you heard someone talk about their relationship with Jesus rather than where they go to church, or quoting Scripture verses in witnessing to their faith? There is nothing wrong with this, but I want to know what Jesus means to you. I want to know why knowing Christ is the best decision you have ever made in your life!

For me the most striking element of this passage from Luke is the fact that Jesus initiates the relationship. Jesus does this by asking a small favor of this band of failed fishermen, thus opening up endless possibilities. Peter could have ignored Jesus' request, but we know he does not. No matter how skeptical Peter may have been, he still responds in the positive to his initial encounter with Jesus. And with this response, Peter is challenged to become part of this movement of God in reaching out to others. And there was nothing conventional in this movement to reconcile humankind to God's Kingdom.

Think about it, God in the person of Jesus became human in order to be able to establish solid relationships with God's created order – particularly you and I. Somewhere along the way, I think the organized church has forgotten that the foundation of every person's faith journey is to be in relationship with the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us. The Church Universal has become so focused on trappings of the faith – arguing over the interpretation of Scripture, whose is right, whose is wrong, instead of living the text from Mark 12:30-31 which clearly states, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Whole churches disagree on worship styles, how to observe the Lord's Supper, who is welcome in the church, and barring those who do not meet certain criteria. Love God, Love your neighbor. It really is that simple. And it is also that hard.

As soon as Peter enters into a personal relationship with Jesus, Jesus is calling Peter to venture farther out and deeper into the waters of life. For the next three years and beyond as we particularly see in Acts 9, Jesus regularly challenges Peter's world view, ever expanding the fish nets to include Gentiles; Samaritans, the tax collectors, prostitutes, the unclean, etc. Jesus is teaching his disciples to continue His ministry and work when his own ministry is complete with his death and resurrection. And you and I are to continue with this work, as those who follow us will continue.

You are not here to earn points for heavenly merit badges; you are here every Sunday so that you can first worship God and secondly become centered into who you are and what God is asking of you. The Reverend Roy Almquist, preaching at Washington Memorial Chapel in Valley Forge a few years ago, summarized his view of this text as follows: "On the surface, Luke's story is about fishing, but I think we know it is really about taking a risk, daring to move out of our comfort zone and to sail into uncharted waters for the sake of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom."

"For many people today, Christian community is a hobby or a pastime, rather than a passion and a central source of identity. For many the Church has become a club, rather than a life-defining mission. And if we are not careful, we can wake up and find that the Church is just another entry in the date-book of life, on equal footing with the bridge club, the golf game and the Rotary Club.

"Tradition calls this lesson ... the story of the magnificent catch of fish. But in reality it is a call to the Church to move beyond the familiar and find new ways of sharing our faith with people who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We like to fish in the shallow, familiar areas, gathering people who are very much like ourselves — folks who know the hymns we like to sing, have had

similar experiences to ours, and share our love for a time-honored style of worship. But today we are called to be mindful of those at the margins of society, those who are underwater in their lives and often feel like they are drowning.” When Jesus gets into your boat and offers a side hustle, accept immediately. Then put out for the deep, that is, take the risk, and then use what you have. What follows will be an amazing discipleship story. As you continue to follow Jesus, you will go not only out into the deep — an external journey — but you will go deep internally, where you will follow Jesus to the cross. You will pick up a cross along the way and learn the lesson of self-denial.

And it all starts with getting to know Christ. I made my commitment to Christ in my early 20’s. I was a graduate student working in a college residence hall in Keene, New Hampshire. For about the past year, I had been spending every free moment with my cousins in Vermont who were part of a growing charismatic community of faith. It all began the Advent season of 1975, at my uncle’s dairy farm. I spent 10 days visiting and working alongside my uncle, aunt and cousins on the farm. Quite unlike my childhood home, there was a spirit of peace and love which seemed to permeate the very walls of their home. It is not that they were more “religious,” but it was so obvious to me that they had a deeper and definitely more satisfying faith than did I...and I found myself yearning for the same. It was not until nearly a year later, however, when I made my formal commitment of faith asking Jesus into my heart as Lord and Savior that I began to experience the quiet joy and soul satisfying peace I had seen so clearly in the lives of my Uncle Werner and Tante Erika and the members of their faith community. I came to Christ through growing relationships with my extended family.

Leading persons to Jesus is not about quoting the proper Biblical texts or strong arming someone to “Come to Jesus” in order to escape the fires of hell! It is about knowing and building a very real and genuine relationship with Jesus the Christ and sharing your life with others in such a way they will crave the same. They will look at you and say, “I want what they have.”

Friends, I truly believe we need to rethink what it means to be a Christian and how we can share the greatest story ever told with the world around us. Perhaps today, this morning is a good place to start over by asking Jesus to deepen His bond with us so that His love spills out over and over wherever you and I go.

When Jesus started his ministry, He wasn’t interested in stacking stones to build a Catholic cathedral, or laying brick to erect a Baptist church, or nailing planks to assemble a Congregational meetinghouse. Instead, he looked for ways to take his message into the very heart of where people were living and playing and working, and he spoke from whatever platform he could find.

John Wesley another unlikely disciple, did the very same, and now you and I need to carry on the tradition. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.