

“A GREAT CATCH”

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Text: Luke 5:1-11 NLT

God’s Word: Isaiah 6:1-8, 9-13 NLT

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One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. ² He noticed two empty boats at the water’s edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³ Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish.”

⁵ “Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn’t catch a thing. But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.” ⁶ And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! ⁷ A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

⁸ When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m such a sinful man.” ⁹ For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. ¹⁰ His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, “Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!” ¹¹ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

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When I was a young girl, my Dad, my Uncle Don, and I would take off on a Saturday morning to a nearby lake. We’d go out in my Dad’s little brim dingy boat for a day of fishing. We’d be out there for several hours. I don’t remember us catching much if anything. Except that one time I went to cast my line and I caught a 190 pound man by the name of Uncle Don! We seemed to come home with more stories than fish! To the point that we were beginning to wonder if the lake had any fish in it.

One time, just one time, my sister Rennay came along with us...My seemingly perfect sister Rennay who couldn’t have cared less about catching a fish came along with us...and you know what? You guessed it...she immediately caught a fish. But even though I wasn’t the one who caught the fish I did learn something on that warm day so long ago...I learned that that lake really did have fish in it!!!

In our Gospel Lesson for this morning we find Jesus calling His first disciples—Simon, James and John—ordinary men, at an ordinary place, doing ordinary things on an ordinary day.

But don't get me wrong, Simon and James and John weren't the kind of fishermen who, early on a Saturday morning, don their favorite beat-up old hat...the one with all the lures hanging from it...and power up their old outboard motor for a trip to their favorite fishing spot.

No. Simon, James and John were what we would call today: "Commercial Fishermen." For them, fishing wasn't recreation—it was serious business...it was their livelihood...for them, it was a life or death enterprise...and they had just finished up an exhausting and extremely frustrating night at work...they hadn't caught a single fish!

As the sun climbs over the horizon, Simon, James and John are on the shore washing their nets, and their minds were probably focused on a hot meal, a soft bed....nothing more—until Jesus shows up. And Jesus doesn't come alone, a great big crowd is surging after Him.

Jesus is preaching the Word of God that transforms lives and the people who were starving for God's Word couldn't get enough...they were hard on His heels. Jesus needed a pulpit in a major way, and Simon's fishing boat does the trick. Jesus got into the boat and asked Simon to put it a little way out from shore, and that is the first request of Jesus that Simon is asked to do...and he seems to do it willingly.

It's neat when you know "the rest of the story," isn't it? It's neat when you know that this same man named Simon would eventually make his own profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord...and would be so transformed that he would be called by a new name—Peter. It's neat to know that this man Peter would deny Jesus 3 times the night He was betrayed...but after Christ's Resurrection...at Pentecost he would stand up before these very same folks who put Christ to death and preach the first Christian sermon. It's neat to know that thousands upon thousands of men, women and children would be saved through the preaching of Peter who would eventually be martyred for the faith. It's neat to know that this is the starting place for all that would come...Jesus using Peter's boat as a pulpit from which to preach the Word of God...It's kind of metaphoric is it not?

For as Christians, we are all to be Christ's pulpit from which God's Word is preached through our words, actions, our transformed lives. Anyhow, Jesus was teaching the people as He sat in Simon's boat. And "*when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'*" Jesus' words must have come as quite a shock to Simon. The deep water? Why even the greenest apprentice knows that it's in the shallow water near the shore that the fish feed. Besides, the sun is now high in the sky—it's hardly the time of day for good fishing...and they had been fishing all night and couldn't catch a thing!

But again Simon obeys Jesus: "*Because you say so, I will let down the nets.*"

...Because Jesus says so...How many of us have the faith to do something that seems like it will be a fruitless affair simply because Jesus tells us to do it? How many of us have tried and tried and tried to get folks to join us at church...only to get nothing but a "No thanks?" And yet Jesus instructs us to keep trying. Do we?

Jesus instructs these weary fishermen who haven't caught a thing all night to keep trying...and look what finally happens when they follow Jesus' instructions!!! They caught so many fish that *"their nets began to break,"* and their boats began to sink.

How many times has a preacher stood in this pulpit and declared that there are a great many souls to be caught in the deep waters of Bucyrus if you would only let down your nets for a catch? And how many times have you heeded this call...and been disappointed?

Jesus tells us to keep letting down our nets...for one day, if we continue to do so, there will be a great catch...so great that the walls of this building will barely be able to hold all the folks!!! If we keep trying...or begin to try fishing for people...and continue to do so...God will save many souls through our efforts.

And you know why? It's because this is God's desire for Bucyrus United Methodist Church. This church exists for the fellowship and edification of believers and for the salvation of the world!!! We are not called simply to minister to one another...although this is one of the very important things we are called to do...we are also called to be a net...to go out into our communities, our workplaces, our schools and fish for the lost, the downcast, the forgotten.

Now, some of you may be thinking to yourself, "Well, this fishing for people...this inviting others to come and worship at Bucyrus United Methodist Church...this may be what some folks are cut out to do...but it's not for me." "I am too sinful." "I am not good enough nor brave enough." Well, if you are thinking this, you are certainly not the first, nor will you be the last.

Notice Simon's reaction to this great big stupendous catch of fish. You'd think he'd be overjoyed, but instead he is afraid and feels as if he is not good enough. For we are told in verse 8 that Simon Peter *"fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'"* Well aren't we all sinful people...saved by grace?

It's interesting how similar Simon Peter's reaction is to Isaiah's when he finds himself before the throne of the Holy God. From Isaiah Chapter 6 that Pastor Mike read for us earlier we see the great prophet Isaiah, in the temple saying: *"Woe is me!" "I am ruined!" "For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."*

But you know what? God takes away Isaiah's guilt and atones for Isaiah's sins...and then God says to Isaiah *"Whom shall I send?"* And Isaiah replies: *"Here am I. Send me!"* Talk about the transforming power of God!

And it was that sort of experience that Simon Peter had, kneeling on the smooth, weathered planks of his fishing boat. For no sooner does he row Jesus back to shore, than Simon Peter leaves his boat and his nets—and yes, even that miraculous catch of fish—and follows Him. The fish are now the least of his concerns.

*“Don’t be afraid,”* Jesus tells him, *“from now on you will catch people.”*

*“So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”* That’s what we are told in verse 11. They *“left everything and followed”* Jesus! Everything.

What do we need to “leave behind” in order to follow Jesus and start catching people? Pride, perhaps? Our comfort zone, maybe? Or is it something else?

Remember the Rich Young Ruler who walked away from Jesus sad? The reason he walked away from Jesus sad instead of joyfully following Jesus was that he was not willing to leave his wealth behind. What makes you rich? What makes me rich? What keeps us from catching people?

Something is really happening here in our Gospel Lesson for this morning. Simon Peter, James and John were making the biggest decision of their lives. Nothing would ever be the same again. That’s what happens when we decide to follow Jesus...nothing is ever the same again! And that’s a good thing...a very, very good thing. Because in following Jesus our lives are changed so dramatically...our priorities become Christ’s priorities...and we begin to fish for and catch people!

We are told nothing about the character, the qualifications or the merits of Simon Peter, James and John. Were they scholars? Probably not, if they fished for a living. They might not have even been able to read or write. Were they particularly righteous? It doesn’t look that way. Were they successful? Doubtfully, in a worldly sense. They were ordinary people, at an ordinary place, doing ordinary things on an ordinary day...but then, but then.

God doesn’t call the able...if He did none of us would measure up! But God most certainly does enable those who heed His call.

Perhaps you have been fishing for people in Bucyrus, but you haven’t caught anyone yet. Perhaps you haven’t even begun to fish. Maybe you think that there are no people out there to catch...kind of like the way I had begun to question whether or not there were any fish in that lake until my sister caught one...

But believe me...there are many people who are just waiting for that hook baited with God’s glorious Gospel to sink down into the depths of their lives!

I want to follow Jesus. I’m going fishing for people. Will you go with me?

Let us pray: Jesus you called three fishermen to leave their nets and follow You. Help us today to be open to your calling as well. Teach us how to fish for people by sharing Your Good News with all the people you enable us to meet. And prepare us for a miraculous catch! In Jesus’ name we pray and for His sake.

Amen.