

“DEEP SEA FISHING”
Luke 5:1-11 February 16, 2025

In November, my wife and I took a vacation down in Key Largo to celebrate our anniversary. Key Largo is the first island you cross over to when traveling on Route 1. If you go south over the string of islands you will end up in Key West. Key Largo has plenty of mangroves but not much in the way of beaches, so if one can afford to live down there you pretty much need a boat. Needless to say, we saw **boats** of all shapes and sizes. We rented a condo in a private community which had a small inlet and a docking area where about 20 boats were tied up. We walked past this docking area on our way to the place where we could sit on Adirondack chairs, eat lunch, and enjoy the ocean views.

It would have been nice to take a closer look at the docked boats, but there was a big sign with red and black lettering, that said no trespassing! There was security cameras set up just in case one was tempted to ignore the sign. This was a private boating dock where people rented spaces. I can understand the purpose of the sign. The boat owners spent thousands of dollars on these sea boats, and some of them paid in the hundreds of thousands of dollars range. Of course, they don't want anyone to mess with their pricy babies!

Still, I wonder what would happen if I ignored the signs, walked out on the dock, and stepped onto one of these boats. I suspect a security guard would be quickly dispatched to the dock and promptly escorted me out of the area and possibly out of the development. Even worse, what if I

decided not only to get on the boat, but also untie it from the dock, and take it out for a splash in the ocean. I imagine the coast guard would not be very happy with me. I would have been arrested, charged with theft, and taken to trial. I don't think my excuse of, "**Well I just wanted to be like Jesus,**" would hold up in court.

From the details Luke gives us, an unsolicited boat visit is precisely what Jesus did when he stepped onto **Simon's boat**. He doesn't ask to be there. He doesn't offer a few bucks to rent the boat for an hour. Even worse, Jesus tells the boat owners what to do. Well, I guess he asked, but still, it was a little brazen and presumptuous to ask fisherman who have worked all night to loan him the boat.

Yet, Simon doesn't seem put out by any of this. Perhaps he was delighted to have such a popular guest step on to his boat. Perhaps he didn't want to be trampled by the crowds either and could finish his morning net routine on the boat with little inconvenience. Whatever the reason, Simon permits Jesus to come aboard and make his boat into a teaching platform.

This morning I want to ask us; how would you **react if Jesus got into your boat?** Would we welcome the intrusion? Would we tell him later dude? Would we say, sure but it will cost you..? Or would our words be, "**No thank you, I've made other plans, I've got business to attend to, or my favorite show is coming on in 10 minutes.**" How would you react?

I can't help but wonder if Jesus isn't attempting to get on our life boats a lot more often than we think. After all, having a life with us is part of the reason Jesus showed up in the first place. To be a disciple, to follow Jesus can't be done from a distance. It's up close and personal. Jesus has this way of intruding that goes beyond our daily devotions. That intrusion might come in the form of someone needing help, a prick of conscience, a word from something we read, a cry of injustice, or just being awestruck in the presence of God's creation. Is Jesus in your boat. If so, what is happening?

In her book *Unbinding the Gospel*, **Martha Grace Reese** says that "our most important discovery is that a vivid relationship with God lies at the heart of real evangelism." You have to ask yourself, "**Has being a Christian made any difference in my life?**" If so, then you're going to want to share this reality with other people. Quite simply, evangelism is grounded in the realization that your life is better because of your relationship with God, and this is a relationship that can benefit others as well.

II. PUT OUT INTO DEEP WATER – GO WHERE THE FISH ARE.

One of my favorite Disney Animation movies is the 2016 **Mauna**. She is the adventurous daughter of the chief and next in line as ruler of her island. But her great desire is to leave the island and sail upon the deep blue ocean, much to the consternation and discouragement of her father. There comes a crisis when there are no more fish in the lagoon. Mauna

wisely points out but there are fish out there beyond the reef, out in the **deep waters**.

When Jesus finished speaking, he said to Simon, **“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”** To be honest, if I had been Simon, I’m not so sure I would have agreed to this command. Who does this guy think he is telling me what to do with my boat. He might give a nice sermon, but where does he get off telling me how to fish. I’ve been a fisherman all my life and daylight is not a convenient time to go fishing. Besides that, I’ve worked all night, the boat has been cleaned, and it’s time to rest.

But Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” **When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boats to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.**

No doubt, all of us would have been impressed with the great number of fish. It certainly bears witness to the abundant nature of God. But I think the greater miracle happened when Simon was willing to take his boat out once more and drop the nets. That was a step of faith, and remember there didn’t have motors, it was oars and sails. In other words this was no small undertaking. There was no guarantee they were going to catch anything. But he goes into the deep and drops the nets anyway.

That’s the challenge for us today: to venture beyond our comfort zones and put out into the deep water in lives of Christian discipleship.

Too often we stay close to shore, safe and comfortable, when Jesus is calling us to be active, adventurous and willing to explore new territory. Why? Because that's where the fish are. That's where the growth happens. That's where we can make surprising discoveries about ourselves and the world around us. That's where we engage in the hurts of the world. That's where miracles happen. Christ calls us to take a step of faith, not knowing what will happen, but simply because Jesus says so.

We scout the deep water when we welcome Christians of different races and nationalities into our congregations. God says through the prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples", but the fact is that only about seven percent of congregations in the United States are multiracial. How does that reflect the kingdom of God? Churches are going to have to do better if they're going to remain vital centers for ministry in an increasingly multicultural society.

III. LET DOWN YOUR NETS.

Simon not only ventured into deep waters, but he also let **down the nets**. The late pastor **Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel** used to interpret this instruction to mean, "**Use what you have.**" Jesus doesn't ask Simon to do something unfamiliar. He simply asks him to fish. Use a skill you already possess.

Too many times we think that to be true followers of Jesus, we need to have special training, special credentials, special tools and a really cool stole to wear on Sunday mornings to serve Christ, when all we need to do is use what we have, and perhaps a little imagination.

There is a church in Ohio, that had two men who were **auto mechanics**. Once a month they offered free oil changes and inspections to senior citizens and people who couldn't afford it. Greeters would welcome the people, offer a cup of coffee, and pray if needed. They dropped the nets. Another church in Ohio gathers after church to go hiking in the many parks around Cleveland. Another one hosts a community garden. Another provides social services for homeless people. Another has a kitchen that equips former inmates with marketable chef skills. Another sponsors an afterschool program for latchkey kids. All of these are dropping the net.

What could you do with your cooking skills, your knowledge of construction, your writing, sewing, listening, HR skills, and so forth. Jesus encourages us to use the tools we have and consecrate them for building the Kingdom of God. I don't think we always need complex well thought out programs, there is a place for those, but more often we simply need to share something we love with the people whom God loves. Drop the nets where humanity gathers.

IV. MOVE TO ACTION

In high school, I learned about electrical resistance in shop class. Whenever electricity travels through matter it meets resistance, which decreases its strength. We built some circuit boards for making lights blink to music. We soldered **tiny resistors** to the circuit board to regulate the flow of electrical current, thus making the voltage from the outlet safe to use.

In all his years of fishing Simon never saw such catch. It dawns on him that he is in the presence of God. In response, he falls down before Jesus and cries out, **“Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man.”** Simon is overwhelmed, astounded, and afraid. He senses his own unworthiness in the face of the Holy. He stepped out in faith, but now he is resisting any further intrusion into his life.

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't seem very concerned about Simon's sins or unworthiness. Instead, Jesus tells him, **“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”** Now I would never say that sin doesn't matter. It can certainly trip us up and depending on the depth of sin can have serious consequences. But if we are waiting to be holy enough to serve God, whatever holy enough means, then we are going to be waiting a long time. Actually, we can use our unworthiness as an excuse to do nothing. If I am reading the gospels correctly, and specifically the parables of Jesus, many of them indicate that doing nothing invites disaster and turns out to be the greater sin.

When Jesus steps into our boat, he will usually ask something from us, often in the form of a faith action step. You will immediately notice a resistance rise up within you, which comes in the form of excuses. Don't be afraid, sail into the deep waters, and drop the net. See what God can do. Like Simon, sometimes we will have to **leave the boat**, and all those fish behind, so that we might catch something far more valuable. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, February 16, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Luke 5:1-11

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.