

This Sunday we’re beginning a new series. For each Sunday in Lent leading up to Palm Sunday and the Choir Cantata, we’ll be looking at five ‘fish stories’ found in the four NT Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This series is called “Gone Fishing.” And like many of us, the Gospels have some really good fish tales!

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Today’s tale is from Luke 5. The setting is a body of life-giving water known by several different names in the Bible: the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberius, but Luke calls it Gennesaret. Lake Gennesaret covers 40,000 surface acres and, at its deepest point, is 141’ deep. For comparison purposes, when full, our nearby Otay Lakes Reservoir has a similar depth, but only covers 1,100 surface acres. According to the 1st century historian Philo, 230 boats were licensed to fish on Lake Gennesaret around the time Jesus was alive.

As Luke tells us, Jesus is standing near this lake teaching a crowd that’s growing larger and larger. Straining to hear him speak, it’s easy to imagine that the crowd presses in on Jesus, maybe even pushing him towards the water that’s lapping onto the shoreline. Jesus spies a couple boats nearby and boards one of them, a boat which belongs to a fisherman named Simon.

According to v. 3, Jesus asks Simon to launch the boat so he can continue teaching from the lake. Most of us know that water serves as a natural amplifier. (It’s just not a good idea to tell secrets on a boat!) But Jesus isn’t telling secrets. He’s sharing things he wants everyone to hear and so from the boat Jesus can continue to teach the crowd without raising his voice or worrying that the batteries on his belt pack might go dead...

Now, I didn’t catch this the first few times I read v. 3, but notice that Jesus boards the boat AND *then* directs Simon to row out onto the lake. Modern etiquette (and I am certain this was true even then) requires that we ask permission before boarding someone else’s boat, and so Jesus’ behavior is presumptuous to say the least!

And this leads to the first of three things I want to say about this story, (and you may want to write down each of these points): First, **Jesus wants to use your stuff!** In our culture we’ve enshrined

the aphorism: “Neither a borrower nor lender be.” And that seems prudent because, odds are, if we loan something out, it might get lost, or broken, or we won’t have the item when we need it ourselves. Many mistakenly believe the adage ‘neither a borrower nor lender be’ is scriptural. It’s not. It is a line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

But Jesus doesn’t seem at all that troubled borrowing something that doesn’t belong to him, does he? Nor is Jesus troubled when he imposes on Simon’s time and energy by asking him to row the boat out onto the lake!

While Christians have learned that *not all of us are called to sell all of our possessions*, the fact remains that Jesus still wants to make of use everything and anything we possess. Jesus wants to use the stuff you’ve got for God’s purposes: your time, your talent, your treasures.

The question is will you make it available to him, or will you hold it back? On Friday our Sr. High youth left for a Winter retreat. Youth group trips often require borrowed vehicles, even from people who don’t have youth at home! Will you make your car available to serve Jesus in this way, or will you hold it back? Even if you don’t normally sing in the choir, Jesus may want to use your voice for the Palm Sunday Cantata. Jesus may want you to open your house to a small group study... Again, will you make it available to Jesus, or will you hold it back?

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This moves us to a second thing we need to notice in this story. After Jesus is done teaching the crowd, he tells Simon, “Row out further and drop your nets into deep water for a catch.”

Because of v. 2, we know that Simon and his co-workers have been cleaning their nets after a fruitless fishing expedition the night before. Most likely, Simon would like nothing more than to just go home and get some sleep. So Simon states an obvious fact that Jesus must’ve missed: “Ahh, Jesus, we fished all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so (and I really hope you don’t say so, but *if you say so*), ‘I’ll do it.’” Can’t you almost hear Simon whining!

Your spouse or children have said things like that to you, haven't they; hoping you'll reconsider what you've asked them to do because they don't really want to do it? (“Please take out the trash.” “But, it's not full!”) My wife has to listen to me do this all the time! Like me, Simon is hoping that once he provides Jesus some new information, Jesus will let him off the hook.

So here's the second point to write down: **most people do not want to do what God calls them to do.** One of the main themes that occurs throughout scripture are call stories. And when we look at these call stories in scripture, rarely, if ever, does anyone agree to do anything God asks of them. In Exodus 4:13, when Moses encounters God at the burning bush, Moses resists the call in four different ways and then says, finally, “Please, Lord, send someone else.” In Jeremiah 1:6, the prophet responds to God's call saying, “I don't know how to speak. I am only a kid!”

So we shouldn't be surprised when our first response to God's call is resistance: I *can't* do that. I *don't want* to do that. I *don't have the time to do* that. I *don't have the skills* to do that. I'm retired. I hate committee work... You know, God has heard that every time and from everyone God has ever wanted to work through! (Andy Grimaud spoke about this yesterday at our monthly men's breakfast, and we are so glad God got through to him after his extended period of being non-religious, atheist, and agnostic for the majority of his life.)

Isn't it a wonderful grace that in spite of our reflexive resistance, God doesn't give up? That God still invites us to partner in doing things that will bless the world? As a pastor, I invite people to do lots of things. I usually ask over and over and over again. I'm sure sometimes people think: “Does he ever take ‘no’ for an answer?”

I hope you see that in my calling as a minister, I'm never going to quit inviting you to deepen your discipleship. Sometimes you need to say ‘no’ because you are not called to do what is being asked. But sometimes you may need to realize that the persistence of the call (and your irritation with it) is actually a sign that God is

beckoning you to move out of your comfort zone; to launch your boat. (Luke 1:38)

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And that leads to a third point to write down:

Jesus always invites us to ‘go deep’; to go deeper in our faith. That's what Jesus says to Simon in v. 4. “Take the boat into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Trust me enough to do what I am asking you to do!

Can you imagine what Simon is thinking, “The gall of this guy! He's a carpenter. I'm the fisherman!” But Simon does it, he trusts Jesus just enough to do what Jesus asks him to do.

There's a song by a Christian songwriter, Stephen Curtis Chapman; the song “Dive”. One of lyrics goes: “The river's deep, the river's wide, the river's water is alive, so sink or swim, I'm diving in.” What a great image! Are you just at the water's edge of discipleship, toe in, testing? Or, are you a little further into the water, preparing for the moment of shock when the cold hits your stomach? What's the next step you need to take to deepen your discipleship, to immerse yourself; diving in to water that's deep and wide and alive with God's grace?

In his book, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Marcus Borg writes, “[A] Christian life is ultimately not about believing or about being good. Rather, it is about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation.” That journey of transformation is exactly what Jesus invites Simon to take with him in v. 10, and it is the journey Jesus beckons all of us to share with him.

Can you think of any synonyms for the word transformation? My thesaurus suggests the following words: convert, reconstruct, alter, and... change. The season of Lent is a season of conversion, of reconstruction, of altering course, and of change. What needs to change most in you so that you will lay down the nets you're clinging to, respond to Jesus' call upon your life, and finally go deeper in your faith? Amen.