

Called to Significance

Luke 5:1-11

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Genesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He 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. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So 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. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and 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.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Theme Statement

When we hear and contemplate the story of the miraculous catch of fish and Simon’s changing attitude toward Jesus as instructions for our own lives, we too are called to obey them.

Exploring the Word

This session’s scripture follows Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue, which ended with a confrontation with the worshipers when they began to question the “hometown boy’s” credentials. Following that episode, he went from Nazareth to Capernaum, where he had a better reception. He was even able to drive out an impure spirit from a man there. This caused people in the area to hear about him.

Luke 5:1-5 Caught by chance

Luke, who was an experienced traveler, is unwilling to use the term *sea* for the Sea of Galilee, as Mark does (Mark 1:16), so he calls this same body of water the “Lake of Genesaret.” He uses this episode to begin the process of Jesus calling the disciples, which continues through 6:14-16, where Luke finally names the twelve.

As the narrative opens, Jesus is teaching and the crowds are growing to the point that Jesus needs breathing room. He gets into an empty boat and asks its owner to take him out a little way from the shore. Though this fisherman has not yet been named in chapter 5, we will soon recognize that he is the same person with whom Jesus had at least one previous meeting, when Jesus healed the fisherman’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39).

The fishermen had been unsuccessful in their labors overnight. One would imagine that they were tired, ready to go home. Yet, maybe out of gratitude, this fisherman took Jesus out so he could speak to the crowd. Did this

gratitude continue when Jesus asked him to put the now clean nets back in the water?

Through twenty-first-century eyes, we might imagine fishing as a lucrative occupation, with fish free for the taking. That is not the case. It was part of an “embedded economy” where there were license fees and production taxes that had to be paid to the wealthy leaders of the occupying forces. Fishermen barely got by in this physically demanding occupation.

Luke 5:6-7 Caught by surprise

In contrast to the lack of catch earlier, the tired fishermen captured so many fish that the net began to break. It was more than they could handle. You can imagine them calling out to those in the other boat to come and help. Even then, the catch was so enormous that Luke says the boats began to sink. The account brings to mind the image of Lucy and Ethel in the chocolate factory from the classic *I Love Lucy* show. No matter what they did, they couldn't keep up!

Luke 5:8-10 Caught by reality

There are parallels between Luke 5:1-11 and John 21:1-19, which has led some commentators to suggest that one of the writers may have repurposed the story to explain Jesus' call of the disciples to a newly understood purpose in life. In both passages, Simon Peter is confronted by his sinfulness in the light of Jesus' power. In Luke's account, Peter's gratitude is amplified as he sees Jesus in an even closer relationship with him. Jesus had helped his mother-in-law, and now Jesus helped him personally.

Luke 5:11 Caught by purpose

In both Luke's account and John's post-resurrection story, Jesus calls the fisherman to a significance that he knew was not earned but given by God's grace. Peter's vocation

as one who gathers and feeds others is seen in a new light—one that is connected to and continues the work of Jesus through the skills learned in it.

The Word Today

A few decades ago, the people at Father Flanagan's Boys Home (often referred to as Boys' Town) developed a set of social skills that would help young people succeed when they entered the workforce. These skills were clearly defined and standardized to make learning them consistent. For example, the skill of “how to follow instructions” had four steps: look at the person giving the instruction, say “okay,” do the task immediately, and check back for further instructions. Using this approach, the adults who worked with young people provided caring guidance and predictable interactions. Most of the young people had come from a chaotic environment, and this built a sense of security and capability.

In this session's scripture we see Peter receiving instructions and responding in a healthy way. When he saw the difference between his own efforts and following Jesus' instruction, Peter's life began going from chaotic to purposeful. Before that fateful day on the lake, he had relied on the fish so he could pay his business expenses and maybe have a little left over to care for his family. On days when the fishing was bad, his weariness was compounded by worry. And at the conclusion of one of those days, maybe using his last bit of strength, he followed an instruction that he may have felt was futile. But this time, Peter was doing it for Jesus.

In the midst of our everyday tasks we are invited to remember Peter and the miraculous catch that day. Jesus didn't ask Peter to plant wheat, something outside his

expertise. He asked Peter to do what Peter typically did. And this time, Jesus invited him to do it in trust, in faith. Peter realized his work had a significance that went beyond himself. And his obedience made an impact.

Jesus asks us to do what we normally do in trust, in faith, that he is working in us, with us, and through us to bring God's love to the people around us. Let's look at him, say "okay," and get at the task. (And check back weekly in worship.)

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. When have you experienced awe that made you stop and think differently about life?

Exploring the Word

1. Reviewing verses 1-5, consider the range of emotions Jesus and the fishermen probably felt, and imagine their faces and body language. List their possible reactions, and be prepared to express them.
2. Make a list of other gospel stories that involve Jesus and the disciples and boats. What insights about Jesus and the disciples do you get as you compare and contrast these stories?
3. How do you understand Peter's request in verse 8 that Jesus go away from him?
4. Jesus used Peter's occupation to call him to proclaim the good news. Using the list of occupations below, or others you think of, describe how Jesus might have issued a call through these occupations in that time and place.

merchant	soldier	farmworker
builder	servant/slave	artisan
	midwife	

The Word Today

1. How often do you sense that Jesus is working through you in the things you normally do?

Hardly ever

Almost all the time

2. Other than your pastor, who could you encourage by pointing out Jesus' work through their actions? How can you graciously recognize them this week?

Closing Prayer

God our creator, you have given us work to do and call us to use our talents for the good of all. Guide us as we work, and teach us to live in the Spirit who made us your sons and daughters, in the love that made us sisters and brothers, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 331)

Further Study

2 Peter 1:16-21; Peter's witness to Christ

Daily Readings

M. Exodus 3:1-12
T. Judges 6:11-16
W. Isaiah 6:1-8
T. Luke 9:57-62

F. Romans 2:1-11
S. John 21:15-19
S. Luke 5:1-11

Memorization

Luke 5:10b

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."