

I had been asked to present a children's message to fit the sermon's theme of following Jesus. To do this, I had invited members of the congregation to participate in acting out the Bible story of Jesus calling the disciples. I began telling the story. "Jesus called out, 'Matthew, will you come and follow me?'"

Slowly, sheepishly, a teen came forward, mumbling, "Yes, Jesus, I will follow you." One after another, "disciples" came forward as I called them, each showing more stage fright than enthusiasm. My heart sank. This wasn't what I'd hoped for.

Finally, I called out, "Peter, Jesus is calling, 'Will you come and follow me?'" John, the young man playing Peter, exploded from the pew, his face radiating joy and excitement. "Yes, yes!" he shouted as he danced up the aisle. "Yes, Jesus, I will, I will! I will follow you."

He heartily embraced me and the other disciples, delighted to have been chosen by Jesus for this great privilege.

We all were silent. John is a member of Friendship Group, a ministry to people with mental impairments. John may never be able to do all that some of us can, but that day he became God's messenger to show us how to express the joy of following Christ.

Let me make one more comment on this thought. We have to go where Jesus goes and Jesus goes into the world. What is so significant about this call is that it happens in the middle of the day on a workday where people are in the middle of work. We talk a lot about finding our place in the church. It is true we have a gift to be used within the body of Christ, but I think we need to start asking another question. This is my father's world; Jesus said go into the all the world and make disciples. Maybe my question should be "what is my place in the world?" Where do I need to go and where do I need to be, so that Jesus can use me? We cannot go with Jesus and stay inside here. Just like Jesus, we have to go into this world. We have got to start seeing work, school, home, sports, our neighborhoods, the ball fields, the golf course, the seashore, the hospital, the road race, the dance studio, the community center, the office... all as holy ground. It is holy because Jesus is there and so are we. We cannot go with Jesus and stay where we are.

Finally, we need to go into 2016 with others. What amazes me about this passage is all the plural language. Yes, this is Peter's calling but notice the words. They pulled up their boats and left everything and followed Him. They

followed Him. Jesus was beginning His ministry and He would not go alone. Jesus called the disciples and they followed Him. We are called to go and we are called to go together.

Jesus' word to Simon Peter is singular in Luke's gospel. You will catch men is singular. It is word to Simon. He has to make a choice. However, the response is plural. They pull up the boat and they follow Him. We do answer God's call as individuals, but our call is a call to go with Jesus and with others.

We must stop asking what is God calling me to do and start asking what is God calling us to do and then, what is my part? We have to stop asking what is God doing in my life and start asking what is God doing in this world and how can I join God?

My friends, I encourage you today. Go into 2016 with hope, with confidence, and go with Jesus and go with others.



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Go With Others

Luke 5:1-11



Everyone has a fishing story. I know that some of you are expert fishermen and women. I have heard amazing stories. Some of you are deep-sea fishermen. You either own or have access to a large boat and participate in contests where you catch the great marlins and the other fish of the deep. Some of you are shore fishermen. You like standing on the seashore with your feet in the sand and casting your bait into the waves. Some of you fish in Jordan or Falls Lake or Lake Gaston. You have your favorite spots whether by boat or on the shore. I have heard some of your fishing stories. I have heard at least two stories not so much about fish as about boats, which sank in the middle of the ocean or a bay. I will not mention names for you know who you are.

I must admit that I do not have very good fishing stories. Most of my stories do not end with a great catch, but having lures cut out of my hands at the Emergency Room or stories of great frustration. My favorite memory of fishing was the few times I went out on the lake with my father and Grandfather. My Granddad was quite the fisherman and even better fishing storyteller. My grandfather owned an old wooden fishing boat that he kept down in the trees and brush at the edge of the water. When the TVA build Norris Lake, they flooded much of the land owned by my family and so literally a half a mile down the road from my grandparents farm was the lake. Years ago the road just ran right into the lake. That is where the old boat could be found. In his trunk was an outboard motor that he would hoist and carry down to the boat and put it in place with a battery and then pull start the motor and we were off. My dad's job for these fishing trips was to provide the snacks. We would stop at the Country Store on the way to the house and buy cokes and clean out the hostess food counter. I cannot remember catching one fish on those trips. But I can remember eating Banana Flips, until I was sick and I can remember watching my grandfather carry that motor thinking he was the strongest man I knew. I can remember riding around on that lake in the old wooden fishing boat. I don't remember catching a fish, but I remember we were together. After

all... that is the best part of the trip. It was to be together. Maybe my fishing story is a good story after all.

Here in Luke we find quite a different fishing story. It is a story of failure and then success. It is a story that is not so much about the incredible huge catch of fish as much as it is about clarification of purpose in life and finding life, true life, by following Jesus. It, too, is a story that is more about being with each other than about the fishing.

Jesus has been traveling through the towns and villages preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. He has been home to Nazareth, only to be run out of town because of what he said in the synagogue that morning. He leaves Nazareth and goes to Capernaum, which would become his hometown. There he again goes to the Synagogue on the Sabbath and begins to teach, however this time he is confronted with a man in the Synagogue who is demon possessed. Jesus heals this man and this one moment causes the people to begin to wonder just who is this Jesus. We are told that after he leaves the Synagogue he goes to Simon's home and there Simon's mother-in-law is suffering a high fever. Jesus rebuked the fever and the fever left her and she got up and to care for Jesus and Simon. In the evening, the word seems to be spreading because showing up at Simon's house are those who have all types of sicknesses and Jesus heals them all. Then at daybreak Jesus went to a solitary place, but they came to him and tried to keep him from leaving. Jesus says he is called to go and preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

This is when our fishing story begins. Luke's story of the calling of disciples is different than Mark's. Mark is more abbreviate and we do not get the back-story of Jesus and Simon. In other words, Luke lets us know that when Jesus called the four fishing brothers to follow him, it was not a stranger calling them but one who had already had contact with them and even whom they had observed heal and teach.

Crowds are following Jesus and He is now at the seashore of lake Genesaret. This was one of

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the names used to describe what we many times call the Sea of Galilee. It is the same place and the same body of water. Genesaret really described a plain near the water that was lush. As the result of Jesus' experience with the people in Capernaum, they are now following Him and wanting to hear what He has to say. They arrive at the seashore and Jesus is teaching. While this scene is occurring there is another scene off to the side. It is Peter, Andrew although now mentioned, James and John and others we can assume washing their nets. We learn that it had been a long night that had essentially ended in failure. They had fished all night and caught nothing. We all know the feeling of working hard and coming up empty. It was not for the lack of trying. It was not that they were lazy. It was not that they did not know what they were doing. They had done the same thing probably most of their lives and the result was failure. They had caught nothing.

In Jesus' day, Capernaum was changing. Once a small fishing town, now the area was becoming more like Jerusalem than Nazareth. It was becoming a commercial center. There were more Romans and others around who were benefiting from a new economy and jobs like fishermen and other working class jobs were actually beginning to struggle. Imagine, if you will, an economy where your occupation is already threatened and then, in addition to this, you have a night where you work hard and maybe harder. Maybe they are even working at night to try harder. Still nothing.

They were washing their nets. Jesus asks if He can borrow one of the boats. You can almost here Peter say, "Sure it is not doing us any good." Jesus gets into the boat and they push Him off the shore just a little way and He teaches from the boat. This way everyone could hear Him and see Him. I wonder if Peter listened or did he just go back and continue to wash his nets. It does not say. I wonder what Jesus said. It does not say. It just says that when He was finished teaching He turns his attention to Simon Peter.

Jesus tells Peter to recast his boat and cast his nets into the deep side. Peter's objection is simply we have worked all night and caught nothing. We have tried that Jesus. Another objection is simply; we are ready to call it a day. They were already to the point they were washing their nets. They were almost ready to head home. The workday was over. No need to reengage. Don't you hate it when you have shut it all down, when you are ready to walk out the door, when you think the job is over only to have someone say, "You need to work a little longer."

Peter's response is interesting. Everything about the moment leads me to a no thank you, but because you say so we will recast our nets. Why would Peter, this experienced fisherman, listen to this carpenter turned preacher? Well, he had spent time with Jesus. Many times we read Mark's account of the call upon Peter, Andrew, James and John's life and we get that vey

succinct account of the calling. Jesus comes down the seashore, sees them there, calls them and tells them to come and follow Him and they lay down their nets and follow Jesus. We conclude there was something about Jesus and His power of charisma or Jesus somehow invaded their minds and made them mindless, where they simply heard a stranger's call and then turned their back on everything and followed Jesus.

However, Luke tells us that is not how the story goes. Jesus has been there, and we really don't know how long. Jesus has already taught in the Synagogue. Jesus has already been healing people. We know that Andrew who was a disciple of John the Baptist has not left John and is following Jesus. Andrew would tell Simon Peter about Jesus. Jesus has already been to Simon's home and healed Simon's mother-in-law.

The picture Luke gives us is not that Jesus is stranger, but that Peter has become acquainted with Jesus. So much that Jesus has been in his home. So much that Andrew is thinking that Jesus is the One, the Messiah. Peter has heard Jesus, observed Jesus and it is leading to a decisive moment of faith. Here it is.

Cast out into the deep. Peter replies, "Because you say so, I will."

Today, you might be the one who is becoming acquainted with Jesus. You are not quite to the decisive moment of faith. You are intrigued. You are interested. You are hopeful like Andrew and you are willing to open your life to what might be possible with Jesus. That is where Peter finds himself. He is open to what Jesus might do.

The story continues that when they cast their nets, there are so many fish in their nets that the nets begin to break. They call for James and John to come and bring their boat and they have such a large catch that it about sinks both ships.

When they get back to the shore Peter's response to Jesus is interesting. It is not thank you very much. That was great. It is not all right, can you stick around Jesus and help us tomorrow. It is not now that I have found Jesus He is one great fish finder. He is going to make me a prosperous man.

Peter's response is, "Master, away from me for I am a sinful man." It is not, "Jesus, stay here and help me." It is, "Jesus, go away." Will Willimon, in one of his sermons on this text, says it is Peter saying, "Jesus get out of here or Jesus leave the neighborhood." Peter's response is, "Jesus, go away for I am a sinful man."

Biblical scholars suggest this is Peter's call. As a call from God, then the response of Peter is in keeping with other calls by God. Moses, get someone else God. Jeremiah, I am only a child I can't do this. Jonah runs from God when he encounters God. Elijah tells God he can't go it

alone. So, Peter's response is expected.

How many of us have heard God's call or felt the nudging of the Spirit of God in our lives, only to answer with "please go away God"? I am not worthy, I am not capable, and I can't do what you are asking. It is to look at God and God's holiness and greatness and know our self so well that we simply say, "What can God do with me." The answer we conclude is nothing. Jesus, please go away I am a sinful man.

Jesus' response to Peter is, "don't be afraid." Jesus sees through Peter's fear, Peter's hesitancy and Peter's own misgiving and says, "Peter, don't be afraid." From now on you will catch men. Don't take this word from Jesus too far in comparison to fishing. In fishing you are baiting fish. In fishing you are using fish for your own use and prosperity. In fishing, you do not have the fish's well being in your mind. So, don't take this picture of purpose and the gospel too far.

Yet, Jesus is using a play on word. Jesus is speaking to a fisherman and he is speaking in a term that Peter and the others would understand. I will make you fishers of men. I am going to repurpose your life.

I think Jesus in a very wonderful way is reminding Peter, who said I am a sinful man, that he knows exactly who Peter is and who Peter can be. When Jesus uses the fishing language with fishermen it is as Jesus is saying I know you, I have been preparing you; I know who you can be. Now come and follow me.

They respond, we are told, by pulling up their boats and following Jesus. There is a decisive moment. There is a moment in time when they know... Jesus is worth my life. So, together they go with Jesus.

As we go into this year, let me share three steps we learn from Peter's calling.

First, let us go into the deep. It is time for us to stop standing in the shallows where the water is shallow, and where we have been for sometime. There is not much danger in the shallows. There is not much risk in the shallows. However, stepping into the deep that is another matter. It takes some risk and it takes trust and faith.

Can you remember learning to swim? I can remember playing in the shallow end. Then it is time for you to learn to swim. You go and you take lessons. You are taught how to swim, but most of the time it is still in the shallow end. Then comes that moment when you swim

into an area over your head. There is that time when you do what you never thought you would do. You jump off the high dive into the deep end. In that moment, you have to trust that what you have learned will work. You will come back up. You will stay afloat if you fill your lungs with air and begin to stroke toward the side. You are going to make it. You are not going to drown. When you reach the side there is relief, but also exhilaration. What do you do? You get out and you do it again.

My friends we cannot continue to go year after year standing in the shallows. We cannot continue to stay where it is safe all the time. Oh we will be safe, but we will be empty. Peter found not only a great catch of fish, but found his true calling by going into the deep.

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What is God calling you to do that are beyond where you are comfortable? It is time to go into the deep? It might be at work. God is calling you to not be so silent about your faith. It is frightening and a little scary, but you are willing to go to the deep. Maybe it is your understanding of the Bible. You really do not read the Bible. Not really. You come to Sunday School and there is normally a Bible lesson. But you really don't dig deep into God's

Word. It is time to go deep.

Maybe it is to share some time with those in need. To engage your life with a new student at school, or a new person in Sunday School, or a neighbor that is really just an acquaintance. We all get comfortable in our routines and relationships, but God is saying if you are going to be obedient, it is time to take some risks and go into the deep.

We need to go to the deep. We need to go where Jesus goes. I love the phrase, "They pulled up their boats and followed Jesus." Boats do not belong on the land. Boats belong in the water. You know what happens to those boats on land? They soon began to deteriorate. It does not matter if it is in your garage, a storage building, and your yard or on the side of the lake or ocean. Boats belong in the water and when you pull them out of the water and leave them, you are truly turning your back on what they were meant to do. Here the fishermen, turned disciples, pull up their boats and leave them.

There is that great saying; "You can't go with Jesus and stay where you are." That just does not work. If we want to go with Jesus then there are some things that must be left behind once and for all.

In the July 7, 2007, e-mail edition of Upper Room Daily Devotional, Jessie Schut of Alberta shared the following experience: