

Learning to Fish – Luke 5:1-11
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION

Do you like to fish? I know we have at least a few avid fishermen here, and in fact a couple of them have even shared some of their catch with me from time to time. Thanks to them I've enjoyed halibut, salmon and even a local trout. But did you know that as followers of Christ we're all fishermen? Why? Because the One we're following is an avid fisherman and he teaches his followers take it up as well. Of course this is a much different type of fishing that doesn't end with us eating our catch; which is a really good thing considering what we're fishing for is people! This type of fishing might best be described as *catch and release*. We catch people with the good news of Christ and then we release them to new life and freedom connected with God in his kingdom.

Jesus was fishing for people constantly throughout his entire ministry on earth. Remember from last week how clearly he stated the purpose for which he had been sent by the Father: *to proclaim the good news that God's kingdom is at hand, and the opportunity to see it, enter it and live there through him is here like never before*. This message and its supporting evidence of signs, wonders and miracles was like the net Jesus was putting into the water everywhere he went to catch lost people so he could then release them to their new life at peace with God and filled up with his presence and power – a new life where they would then take up the family fishing business of catching and releasing others to the same new life and freedom they'd found through Christ. Remember what Jesus said would happen to those first disciples if they would simply *follow him*? ***"...I will make you become fishers of men."***

Well, as any good fisherman knows, learning to actually catch fish while fishing takes learning and practice and the best and fastest way to learn is by spending time with another good fisherman. To fish well you need to learn some basic skills and you need to learn where to fish, what time to fish, what attracts the fish, and how to actually get the fish in the boat when you catch it. I learned the importance of that last skill in a very memorable way when I was in junior high.

My Grandad had taken my cousin, Jake, and I fishing for king salmon on the Kenai River. As some of you may know, fishing for kings takes a lot of patience, but the payoff is really big when you finally catch one of those giants which can weigh between 40 and 100 pounds.

Well, on this particular day my Grandad was overjoyed when he finally did hook a gigantic king salmon. Jake and I watched in awe as he skillfully and carefully reeled in that giant fish until he finally had it right next to the boat. Now it was time to get it into the boat, which as you can imagine can be quite tricky with a fish that large. He told us to get the net in the water and then be very careful to get it underneath and around him without knocking him off the hook. Talk about high pressure! Neither of us had ever netted a king salmon before, but now it all depended on us.

As both of us held onto the handle of the big net we tried desperately to maneuver it around and under the still struggling fish. Seeing an opportunity we moved quickly to net the fish and watched in horror as he moved suddenly, bumped the rim of the net and the hook came right out of his mouth. Our Grandad's prize king salmon swam away forever. And I can definitely tell you that catch and release was not what my Grandad had in mind here! Our day's fishing expedition came to a quick and sudden end, and my very red-faced Grandad had a wonderful opportunity to exercise self-control; which he did valiantly. I don't think he said another word to us for the entire trip home. Sometimes it's best to just keep our mouths shut!

It's clear that Jake and I needed some fish netting skills to be able to get that giant king salmon into the boat, just as everyone who wants to move beyond just fishing to actually catching needs to learn a few things from a fishing master. Well, today in Scripture, we're going to learn, from the Master fisherman, three people-fishing skills that will enable each of us to move from casual fishing to successful catching. Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, where we find Jesus and his first 4 disciples back at the Sea of Galilee and this time getting in a boat together for a fishing and learning expedition.

Let's begin by reading the full passage:

1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on [Jesus] to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, FOR I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 FOR he and all who were with him were astonished 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. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to the truth.

LEARN TO CAREFULLY LISTEN

Well, Jesus is back at the lake which he and his disciples spent so much time on and around. Here in these verses it's called the Lake of Gennesaret, but it's also known as the Sea of Galilee AND the Sea of Tiberias...three different names for the same body of water. Interestingly in the Old Testament it's called the Sea of Chinnereth. I like to call it the Sea of Many Names! Well, here at the lake, Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd of people who were described as ***pressing in*** on him. We get this picture of people leaning forward to get as close as possible to

Jesus, and this time it was not just to receive a miraculous healing. They were pressing in on him *to hear* what he had to say. They were pressing in to *listen carefully* and hear every word that was coming out his mouth. They were pressing in to listen to the word of God.

The crowds were pressing in on Jesus so much here, in fact, that he soon realized he needed an alternate plan so *everyone* would be able to hear what he had to say. He probably needed a little space to breathe too! Getting into Simon Peter's boat, he had Peter take him a little ways out into the water where he sat down and began to teach the people. The acoustics of the water and the natural amphitheater of the shoreline were perfect for allowing the large crowds to hear his teaching. Can you picture yourself in the crowd on the beach that day, listening to the Master teach across the water? What an experience that must have been!

Again we see here that Jesus in person had a powerful effect on people, and they found him very worth pressing in on and hanging on his every word. They knew he was speaking perfect, authoritative truth from God and they were listening carefully and diligently. Are we doing the same? Are you pressing in on Jesus and listening carefully to his every word? Do you believe that he alone has the truth you need for living life? While it would have been amazing to hear Jesus speak in person, we're even more blessed to have his teachings written down for us and available at all times. But are we regularly pressing in to hear what he has to say? Is he the one teaching us how to live life, or are we letting "the counsel of the ungodly" guide us without even realizing it? That counsel's all around us on TV, from our co-workers, our friends, the news and oftentimes even from ourselves. And if we're not regularly pressing to hear what Jesus says, we'll just be walking in the counsel of the ungodly without even realizing it.

So the first fishing skill we need is this: *Learn to carefully listen*. You won't learn anything from the fishing Master if you're not paying attention to him, watching what he does, listening to his instructions, and then seeking to do what he says to do. In this interesting fishing metaphor given by Jesus, we realize that fish are being caught by *listening carefully* to the word of God...by pressing in on Jesus to hear what he has to say. ***Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*** But we also see that when these fish are caught they become fishermen who then learn to fish by *listening to* and *learning from* the Master. In other

words, listening is just as essential for fishermen as it is for fish needing rescuing. *Learn to carefully listen.* We'll see how listening preceded a great catch of fish as we move forward to what happened next after Jesus finished teaching the people from the boat.

I wonder if Peter's eyes were getting droopy as he sat in the boat with Jesus and listened to him teach. Clearly Jesus was a compelling speaker who had every person in the crowd hanging on his every word, but Peter we find had been up all night working hard so we could forgive him if he was a little on the sleepy side. As Jesus finished teaching, it seems that the last thing on Peter's mind was a boat ride and some more fishing. But nevertheless Jesus says to him: ***"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."***

Do you think Peter was tempted to act like he didn't hear Jesus and start heading for shore? I would say so based on how he responds: ***"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."*** Even though Peter wasn't "feelin' it" at all, still he listened and responded to Jesus words. And had he refused to listen to Jesus' request or had he listened with a hard heart and said, "No," he would have missed the greatest catch of fish he would ever see in his life, and even more importantly, the amazing discovery of who he was dealing with here. Listening is just as important for fishermen as it is for fish.

Jesus was now done teaching the fish, but he was about to do a different type of teaching with the fishermen. These men had lots of experience catching literal fish, but they had a thing or two to learn about catching people-fish. Learn to carefully listen to the Master is skill number one.

LEARN TO SELFLESSLY TRUST

But listening by itself is insufficient. As Peter listened to Jesus he found that the Master's instructions were hard and way different from what he would have chosen to do. His natural reaction to what Jesus was asking him to do was: *I'm tired, this is a waste of time and it won't work!* Have you ever reacted that way to what Jesus asks you to do in Scripture? Or to how he teaches you to respond to difficult situations in your life? How eager and willing are you to offer your new pair of shoes to someone who just stole your favorite coat? How eager and willing are you to try doing good to someone who's treated you very badly? How eager

and willing are you to maintain integrity and honesty when you know it will likely cost you your job? How about devoting time to solitude and prayer and study of the Word even when there are a zillion other things you think need to get done?

The fact is, the way Jesus teaches us to live life flies in the face of all our natural human responses and so-called practical human wisdom. He turns everything on its head and to follow him we regularly have to set aside our natural responses and what seems to make sense from a practical (and usually selfish) perspective. In other words, we have to *learn to selflessly trust*...to set aside what seems best from a human and self-focused perspective with trust that God's way is better even though it may cost us dearly. Peter had to do that here if he was going to see the power of God at work in fish-catching, rather than continuing on in his own ingenuity and practical experience, which had miserably failed him the night before.

And notice how hard this was for him. He did set aside his natural response to follow what Jesus asked him to do, but not without a hard fight that showed up in his words: ***"...we toiled all night and took nothing, but AT YOUR WORD I will let down the nets."*** In other words: *I'll do it, but I'm not expecting much.* And yet still he did it, even though it was a bit begrudgingly at this point. The second fishing skill for people-catching is this: *Learn to selflessly trust.*

LEARN TO SACRIFICIALLY OBEY

So far we've seen that Peter was willing to listen to Jesus and then willing to set aside his own ideas in order to trust what Jesus had told him. Now we see that the listening and the accepting of what Jesus said was followed by the taking of obedient action. Despite his tired body and his skepticism about Jesus' fishing plan, he moved to costly action in order to do what Jesus said to do. He and his partners began rowing the boat out to deep water and then they dropped the net in to see what would happen. They were learning the third and crucial fishing skill: *Learn to sacrificially obey.*

What was the sacrificial cost to them? More hard work after a long and unsuccessful all-nighter and for what would have seemed to any Galilee fisherman to be wasted effort – fishing in the middle of the day, no less! Every time we read about commercial fishing in the Sea of Galilee it's being done at

night. Even nowadays the middle of the day is rarely considered a prime fishing time. You can imagine that it was probably not only Peter who thought this was going to be wasted effort! Another cost: *looking foolish to people around them*. The other fishermen cleaning their nets on shore probably chuckled to themselves when they saw Peter and his partners putting in a net in the middle of the day.

Doing what Jesus asks us to do will often look foolish to those around us because his ways are usually opposite of what the world would tell us to do. And his ways will often cost us dearly from a worldly perspective. Think of what it would cost you to give up your brand new Nikes to someone who just stole your coat. Or what it would cost you to lose your job because refused to do something wrong even when commanded to do so by your boss. Or what it would cost you to refuse to rant and rave about someone who's hurt or cheated you in some way and instead do something nice for them. Or what it would cost you to disappoint some people by not getting something done as soon as they wanted because you made regular time to pray and seek after God and it's meant fewer things getting crossed off your to-do list each day.

There is most definitely a cost to listening, trusting and obeying Jesus. That's why it's so hard for us to do it, and why it looks like foolishness to those around us. But, my friends, even reluctant and begrudging obedience is still obedience and sometimes that's where we need to begin; because simple obedience to Christ is what makes the way for the mighty power of God to bring a great catch of fish. In this case, a catch of fish that was so massive it was sinking two boats. And these were not small boats. In 1986 a Galilee fishing boat from Jesus' day was brought up from the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, and how big do you think it is? Its 27 feet long and 7 ½ feet wide, has places for 4 rowers, and has a mast for a sail. In other words, it's not your typical row boat. The boat is commonly called "the Jesus boat," though of course it hasn't been specifically proven to be one that he used. You can now see it in a museum in Israel (NetBible.org).

But the point is that this was a massive catch of fish in the middle of the day after a night of getting completely skunked, and the supernatural nature of the catch was so overwhelming that Peter knew he was dealing with the work of God here. No one else but God's Anointed could have power over even the fish in the sea. He fell at Jesus' knees and said, "***Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.***"

Jesus had moved quickly from Master to Lord for Peter as his awesome power was revealed in the midst of his reluctant obedience.

The fishing lesson was complete. Unlike Peter's previous night of fishing that had proved exhausting and frustrating, this new kind of fishing in the power of God for his purposes was exhilarating and fruitful. And Jesus said: ***"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."*** In other words, the type of fishing you'll be doing from here on out is changing dramatically...from fish to people. And like this catch of fish you've experienced here today, your catching of people will also be done by my power as you carefully listen, selflessly trust, and sacrificially obey. I can use you even in your weakness and wherever you are in your growth with me. Just follow me and I will make you become fishers of men...fishermen who actually catch something.

And notice how Peter and the other disciples responded to Jesus here. They left everything and followed him. This seems to be the point where Peter and Andrew and James and John gave up their fishing business for good and put all their "stock" in Jesus Christ. Everything else the world had to offer looked like nothing compared to the invitation to follow Jesus and live life with him!

CONCLUSION

My friends, you and I in Christ are called to take up fishing...to fish for people everywhere we go like Jesus, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, and repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the doorway to enter it. But we're not called to proclaim a message that we're not living. We're not called to just live life like everyone else but tack on church attendance, maybe a Bible study, and handing out *The Four Spiritual Laws* tract everywhere we go. Instead we're called to a new and radical life in God's kingdom, where we follow Jesus in real life every day and learn to live life like him by the power of the Spirit dwelling inside. This is a place where we carefully and regularly listen to Jesus through the Word and prayer, selflessly trust what he teaches us, and then sacrificially obey him no matter what it costs.

And I will tell you that if we begin living this way and actually taking Jesus and his teachings seriously, little by little putting them into practice in our lives, we're going to start catching lots of fish together. And it won't be because we've fine-

tuned our evangelistic method or figured out just the right way to convince people to believe. Instead it will be because God's power comes to work mightily through those who will press in on him...who will learn to listen, trust and obey, even if it's reluctantly and hesitantly at first.

And when we begin living this way, those without Christ will see the unmistakable hand of God in our lives as he makes us into radically different people like they've never seen before...people who do good to those hurt them...people who give away their goods to those in need...people who tell the truth no matter what it costs them...people who refuse to withhold forgiveness and refuse to bear a grudge... people who sacrificially love those around them...people who are building God's kingdom and not their own. That's the kind of people Jesus will make us to be as we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him (see Luke 9:23).

As we see through Peter here in this passage and in the rest of his life and ministry: *Imperfect, in-progress followers of Christ who will simply listen, trust and obey, become vessels of Christ's power, bringing a great catch of people following Christ into God's kingdom.* This is something God can do through every single person willing to follow him. Are you pressing in? Are you listening to him? Does he have a direct line into your life where you are daily listening to and learning from him through his Word and prayer? And as you hear from him, are you willing to set aside your ideas about will and won't work or what you will and won't do, in order to take up what he teaches you to do? And are you willing to obey him no matter what it costs? With these three fishing skills we can expect a great catch of fish that will bring us to our knees in awestruck worship of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.