

Luke 5

Advent - Hope

11/20/2019

This mission of making followers of Jesus began when Jesus called his first followers, His first disciples, in the passage that we'll look at today.

And in these interactions, we also see what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

If you're in church circles you will hear a lot about being a disciple, or discipleship. And pretty often we talk about discipleship like it is a program that serious Christians go through at some point. It's a module you add on to the Christian life: there are Christians and then there are disciples, who are basically the Seal Team 6 Christians who have been through a training program that involved heavy Bible memorization and solo-time in the woods, they probably ate the Daniel diet and and took a missions-trip to a hostile country. They memorized enough verses, completed the classes, and got their "official disciple" certificate.

And if people ask, "Does your church do discipleship?," they are usually looking for intensive Bible study programs. And I am very much for intensive bible study, it is a vital part of the Christian life and we won't grow much without it. But if we boil being a disciple down into taking some classes and earning some certification, we miss out on much of what it is to be and make disciples.

But in this passage there's a boiled down picture of what discipleship is, of how to become a disciple, and what the life of a disciple looks like. It isn't just going through a church program on Monday nights, and it isn't the experience for just the elite Christians.

Let's read our passage today and then walk through it:

Luke 5 1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him 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.

So Jesus is teaching outside by the lake of Gennesaret. This is also called the Sea of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee in the Gospel accounts, it was basically named by different people on different sides of the lake, which is why it got all 3 names.

It's a lake that is 35 miles in circumference, and a lot of Jesus' ministry took place near or on this lake. Jesus performed about 33 miracles that were recorded, and 10 of them were along this lake, including most of His healing miracles. This is the lake that Jesus walked on, calmed a storm on, the lake that Peter later walked on. Jesus preached the sermon on the mount overlooking this sea. Capernaum, where Jesus spent a lot of time, is along the north shore of this lake. This is the backdrop for much of the ministry of Jesus.

So Jesus is teaching near the Sea, and the crowds are huge. At this phase of His ministry, Jesus had major space issues, houses and synagogues were often standing-room-only when Jesus showed up. (So by the way, the goodness of a church isn't connected to its size - it's a good church if Jesus and his teaching is at the center of it, whether its big or small.)

So Jesus often taught outside in part due to the crowds, but fortunately they had a near perfect climate, similar to southern California, where it will be dry and sunny and 73, so they could meet outside and not worry about the building constraints. We wish we had their climate - we'd just do this on parcel 5 and not have to worry so much about a building. But we sometimes get snow storms and can't do that, so we meet indoors.

So the crowds are pressing in on Him and it is difficult to speak to the thousands in the back, so He borrows a boat from Peter and pushes out a little and makes that his stage

to preach from. Peter owed Him a favor after He had healed Peter's mother-in-law so he loaned him what was probably a 20 or 30 foot long fishing boat.

And from there Jesus taught the people.

This is probably happening in the morning because the fishermen are washing their nets after their shift, and it was a type of net that was only used for night fishing.

They used trammel nets¹, which would have floats on one side and weights on the other so when they dropped them into the water they'd form a wall. And one boat would make some noise to scare the fish into the net while the other pulled them up. You could only do this at night because the fish would see the nets in the day and it wouldn't work.

So Peter, James and John are cleaning up after working the night shift and they loan Jesus the boat for the morning Bible study.

And Jesus says something that could have been perceived as a little annoying to the experienced fishermen:

4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Have you ever had someone who has never done your job tell you how to do your job? And here comes Jesus, a Bible teacher, who tells Him how to fish. Preachers aren't known for their practical skills. And before teaching, Jesus had a background in carpentry. But He is still bold enough to tell Peter to go back out onto the water and let down the nets again. He's preacher-splaining to Peter how to do his job.

And here's Peter who has worked all night with no results, so I assume he's not in a great mood. A night with no fish is a day without a paycheck, so there's probably the normal anxiety ("too many nights like this and my family can't eat.") He has already been washing the nets. To tell him to throw them in again would be like when that person walks into the restaurant ten minutes before closing and you've already mopped and cleaned up.

There must be a temptation in Simon Peter to think, "If we didn't catch fish doing it the right way, we certainly won't catch them the wrong way. Jesus, why don't you stay in

¹ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel According to Luke](#), (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2015), 153.

your lane and stick to what you're good at. You teach the Bible, I'll catch the fish. The nets are cleaned, the fishing boat is closed for the day."

But Peter has already learned a lesson: there's power in the word of Jesus. Jesus has just rebuked the fever in Peter's mother-in-law, and at His word the fever left her. And Peter has been listening to Jesus teach, he knew the power and authority of the words of Jesus. He knew Jesus wasn't like any other bible teacher who really should stay in his lane.

So

5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

at the word of Jesus He lets down his nets.

You can hear that Peter is conflicted. Peter is the expert. Peter knows what he is doing. Peter has already tried what Jesus is telling him to do. Peter doesn't think this is going to work. But at Jesus' word, he lets down the nets. He has experienced enough of the reliability of Jesus's word to act, almost against his better judgment.

I wonder if we have that much confidence in God's word. We have labored at fixing the marriage, healing the relationship, resisting the sin, at maintaining Christian relationships. But it hasn't worked. The marriage hasn't improved. The Christian relationships are only draining. *We tried, and we're done.* But the word of God comes along, "love your wife as Christ loves the church," or into our temptation the Lord speaks : "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22), into our broken relationships the scriptures say: "Love one another with brotherly affection" (Romans 12:10).

Do we usually say, "I tried that - I'm in the market for a different solution now," Or do we say "But at your word, I'll try it again?"

Believing in Jesus means trusting His word, acting according to His word, and even when the experts have spoken against it or our experience tells us it doesn't work, even when we've tried that, those who trust Him let down their nets again.

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.

They catch so many fish that their nets are breaking and their ships are sinking. After a night of catching nothing. So this is clearly a miracle.

When God created Adam in the garden, the first part of his job description was to have dominion over the fish of the sea:

Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Jesus came as the true and better Adam who had complete dominion even over uncontrollable things like fish in the sea.

And Jesus just delivered to these career fishermen the greatest haul of fish they've ever taken, their biggest payday ever. And they've probably been working in their father's fishing business for upwards of 20 years.

Jesus is clearly someone different.

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."

Now this is a weird response.

You might expect more of a celebration. They just got a huge windfall - like getting the biggest commission check or the biggest Christmas bonus you've ever had. So pop the cork and celebrate! See if Jesus wants to come by every morning and just speak some fish into the nets. Miracle workers are great to have around!

But Peter's response is, "Jesus, go away. I'm not worthy to be around you."

The windfall is still flopping around in his boat, but Peter is telling the one who gave him the windfall to go away.

Don't you get it Peter? Jesus is singling you out for his blessing here. Everybody wants this kind of attention from Jesus. There's this huge crowd pressing in to be near Jesus, so much so that He has to get in a boat and get some breathing room. But Peter, Jesus singles you out for His blessing and you say "Go away?"

Why?

Peter says why.

"Because I am a sinful man" (verse 8).

Peter experiences here what R.C. Sproul calls the "trauma of [God's] holiness."² Peter is beginning to know something these crowds don't grasp yet. Jesus is unlike any other. Jesus is holy and powerful, not just a great teacher, not even just a great prophet. But something else altogether. And to draw near to Him could be dangerous for a sinful person.

You see this all through scripture. Isaiah sees the glory of God and says, **"And I said: Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5)**

The children of Israel in the Exodus said to Moses, **"Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:18-19).**

John Calvin writes, "... Scripture uniformly relates [that] holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God."³

Sometimes we think that the only true experience with the presence of God is one where we slip easily into the relationship with Him. He's the One we were made for, so when we find Him, we do nothing but run to Him, and knowing Him is only always comfortable. And, while the ultimate goal is that kind of closeness with God, when we really meet Him,

² Sproul, R. C.. The Holiness of God (p. 48). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

³ John Calvin, as quoted in Sproul, R. C.. The Holiness of God (pp. 48-49). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

at first there is a sense of His holiness and power and our unworthiness. There is some trauma.

Because of our sin, our relationship with God is complicated.

Our default relationship with God is one where we can't live without Him and can't live with Him. We all long for the perfect One with a perfect love and perfect wisdom and knowledge. We are hard-wired for relationship with God, and our whole quest for fulfillment and perfect joy and perfect peace and perfect love that we're always looking for is there because we need the perfect One to fill the void. And the reason we're always lacking satisfaction in those categories tells us we still haven't found what we're looking for. So we, like the crowds, press in to find out more when we hear about the Divine coming near.

But when we see Him for who He is, when we get close, we sense that we can't live with Him either because of the weight of our sins. Really coming close to His holiness doesn't allow us to feel at ease at first.

Peter knows that an encounter with the true God is traumatic. It's humbling. It causes you to see your sin next to His perfection. It doesn't make you feel worthy to rush into His presence.

And remember, it's at this moment that Peter is called to follow Jesus, to be a disciple.

Often we think a disciple is someone who has it together on their own. Someone who has done enough good and is obedient enough and trained enough to finally be called a disciple of Jesus. It's someone with enough zeal, enough of their own moral holiness. Someone who works up enough of their own glory so that Jesus can be brought into it.

But you become a disciple when you recognize your own unworthiness and the superior worth of Jesus.

Michael Horton writes, "The struggle of the church...is not to envelop Christ in our faithfulness, but to be enveloped by Christ's."⁴

We become a disciple not by being good enough to be worthy of Jesus, but by clinging to the goodness of Jesus. And you see throughout the Gospel narrative that the people

⁴ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011). 670.

who think they're good enough for Jesus fail miserably, while the people who recognize their unworthiness are used greatly.

Peter is a great example of this. This was actually a good moment for Peter, the moment he is humble and senses his unworthiness and is invited to be a follower of Jesus. Contrast this with Peter later on. On the night that Jesus went off to be crucified, Jesus told Peter, "You'll betray me three times."

And Peter said, **"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." (Luke 22:33)** But that night, sure enough, he betrays Jesus.

When he recognizes his own weakness and sin and unworthiness he is invited to be a disciple. When he thinks he is strong on his own, he falls, and needs to be restored.

Faithful disciples are people who recognize their own unworthiness to be disciples. Failed disciples are the ones who think they've achieved enough to be strong on their own.

Again we see the pattern that in the kingdom of God, it's not that the morally good people come in and the morally bad people are kept out. But the humble are in and the proud are out.

We saw this a couple of weeks ago when Jesus taught in the synagogue. The people there thought they were worthy of Jesus doing some miracles. And as a result, they got none. Those who think they are worthy are out, and those who recognize that they are unworthy are in.

People in synagogue thought they deserved Jesus and Jesus left them. Here Peter knows he isn't worthy and Jesus calls him.⁵

So a disciple first and foremost is someone who recognizes the holiness and superiority of Jesus, and secondly, who sees his or her own sin and unworthiness in stark contrast.

John Calvin wrote, *"Christ sinks his own people in the grave, that he may afterwards raise them to life."*⁶

⁵ Edwards 156

⁶ from Calvin's commentary on Luke 5 here: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/luke/5.htm>

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote, “When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less.”

So here’s some real hope for the first week of Advent - a disciple is not somebody who has his or her own moral strength and holiness, it isn’t someone who has reached an elite plain of existence. It isn’t someone who has experienced some second work of the Spirit in his or her life to make them truly holy. It isn’t someone who reaches a level of sinless perfection. It is someone who recognizes who Jesus is and sees himself as unworthy to be in His service.

So maybe you are in a place in your life where you just feel like such an intense failure - you’re not who you should be, you’re not who you had hoped you would be by now, you’re not the dad or mom you wanted to be, your moral purity is not what it should be, your motives are mixed so often, and there’s a sense that you are a failed Christian. You may not be in as bad a spot as you think: being a Christian disciple is about trusting in who Jesus is for you and recognizing your own failures.

There are lots of Christians who hold out hope that something will come into their lives, some second wave of the Holy Spirit, that will transform them into the kind of Christians they want to be. Some, like Wesley, taught entire sanctification, which was, in Wesley’s view, not the idea that you would be absolutely perfect, but that you would reach a level of personal holiness and righteousness as to never commit what you knew to be a sin. There would still be sinful accidents, but no more conscious sin.

But:

1 John 1:7-10 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Our life as Christians is not about becoming so perfect on our own that we can now absorb Jesus into our glory. It is about seeing his glory as brighter and brighter, seeing more and more how unworthy we ever were to be part of his work, and being more in awe of the cross and the forgiveness it purchases us.

There is real growth, but that growth never looks like becoming so perfect on our own that we don't need Jesus. With all of our moral growth, and there is plenty of it, should come not a religious arrogance, but a humility.

God can certainly move in our lives again and again to change us and free us refine us., He does give us a fresh view of the cross and fresh faith and repentance over and over. But we will never grow past our need for Jesus.

And we become disciples when we recognize the holiness and power of Jesus, and our unworthiness to be near Him.

You might say, "So it doesn't sound like becoming a disciple is that much different from becoming a Christian?" Right!

Acts 11:25-26 - "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Disciples are Christians. The Bible knows nothing of Christians who aren't disciples or of disciples being second-tier elite Christians. That distinction isn't made. To become a Christian is to become a disciple of Jesus. All Christians were just called disciples until Acts 11 when they were first called Christians.

Which means that if we are true Christians, we are disciples. We are already disciples if we are really His. To bear the marks of a disciple is to bear the marks of being, not an elite second-tier Christian, but just of being a Christian.

So what are some of those marks? What are the marks of a true Christian, of a true disciple?

Disciples are Learners

Peter and the others begin in this passage by listening to Jesus teach. They listen to His words and respond to His words. Disciples learn the words of Jesus and work to apply His words to their lives. To be a disciple is to regularly hear and read and dwell on and apply God's word.

And remember, this is what Christians do. We don't become Christians without hearing some of God's word, and the life of the Christian is a life in the word. Our ultimate authority is Jesus, and we think the thoughts of Jesus by reading His word.

That's what books do. They are the way I can think a thought, put it down on paper, give it to you, so you can read it and now you're thinking that thought too. We transfer thoughts through the written word, and learners of Jesus have His thoughts transferred to us as we hear and read His word. So a follower of Jesus grows to know Jesus more through His word.

Disciples are Followers

And disciples follow Jesus. We always imitate those we most respect and those that we spend a lot of time around. Children, without being told to, imitate their parents. Siblings imitate an older sibling. And we have the ultimate respect for Jesus and the most intimate bond with Jesus, so it makes sense that those who know Jesus are imitators of Jesus.

And Jesus said that those who follow Him imitate Him in the greatest thing He did, giving His life on the cross:

Luke 9:23 "And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Just as Jesus gave his life for us, his disciples, Christians, are people who imitate by giving ourselves to others in ways that are costly to us. We can't be Christians and have a life that is pain-free, a life where we don't serve, a life where we don't make sacrifices and live generously.

Followers of Jesus *follow Jesus*.

And one key way Christians follow Jesus, according to this passage, is by joining in His mission:

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.

Disciples are on the Mission of Jesus

When Mark records this scene he says that Jesus elaborated by saying **“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17)**

Followers of Jesus are on the same mission as Jesus.

And that’s a mission to make more people into followers of Jesus.

Jesus said it this way:

Matthew 28:18-20 “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Jesus says disciple the nations - make more followers of Jesus. And we do so by baptizing (leading to faith in Jesus and baptizing them), and teaching to follow Jesus. The goal is that we would follow Jesus by making more followers of Jesus.

Often we’re reminded of that mission and we feel guilty. Most of us haven’t led a lot of people to Jesus individually. We don’t always have the right words in a conversation. And we can look at our lives and not feel like we have, as individuals, done much of this at all.

On the one hand, I don’t want to excuse our lack of zeal here. We are called to bring the message of Jesus to people, all followers of Jesus participate in this mission. Some would say, “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words,” but the Gospel is a message, it’s news, words are needed. It is at the powerful word of Jesus that hearts are persuaded. So we are called to bring it to others.

But on the other hand, we have to remember that Jesus always forms a people and a community, and hasn’t called us to just be individual operators in this mission. The mission to bring people to Jesus and teach them to know Jesus falls on us individually but also on us as a community.

And there is a collective work that we are called to, that all Christians have participated in.

If you have worked to have a strong web of Christian relationships, when those who don't know Jesus come into them it is a powerful piece of evidence to them that Jesus is real.

John 13:35 “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

When you are kind to a neighbor or a friend, that doesn't get the gospel to them. More is needed. But less isn't needed.

Notice that the first thing Jesus does for Peter here is fill his boat with a miraculous catch of fish - He showers him with kindness. Romans 2:4 says the kindness of God leads to repentance. Everything we do matters. The setting up coffee, the opening your home for dinner, coaching the kids team, having the neighborhood Christmas party, giving to those in need, supporting the work of the church, encouraging the discouraged Christian, all of those things are part of the mix.

Matthew 10:42 “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

And even striving to do right, to live in a godly way, to forgive others and share life with other Christians, it all matters. The way we live as Christians by itself isn't accomplishing this mission. But it does testify to our hope in Christ, and when mixed with the words of the Gospel, there is power that makes disciples.

So disciples are Christians. And the marks of a Christian are that we are people who learn from Jesus, follow Jesus, and participate in the mission of Jesus. Which only happens if we see that He's worth it. These first disciples, on their biggest payday ever, left the miraculous catch of fish flopping on the beach, so they could follow Jesus. Because they saw His dominion over the sea, they saw His power, they heard His words, and they had to live their lives for Him now.

But at the moment they left the boats, they had no idea how great He was or all He would do.

We think it would be great and compelling to see this miracle, but we know something they didn't know yet that should compel us toward even more worship and obedience.

We know that Jesus went to the cross.

And it was there that He solved the can't live with Him, can't live without Him problem.

We can't stand in light of his holiness because we are sinful people, so He took our guilt. So we could be forgiven and freed.

Scriptures Referenced:

Luke 5:1-11

Luke 5:4

Luke 5:5

Luke 5:6-7

Genesis 1:26

Luke 5:8

Isaiah 6:5

Exodus 20:18-19

Luke 22:33

1 John 1:7-10

Acts 11:25-26

Luke 9:23

Luke 5:9-11

Mark 1:17

Matthew 28:18-20

John 13:35

Matthew 10:42

Notes

Luke 5:1-11

What is a Disciple?

- I. Someone who knows the holiness of Jesus and their own unworthiness
- II. Simply, a Christian
- III. A Learner
- IV. A Follower
- V. Someone on the mission of Jesus

Questions for Discussion in Small Groups:

- 1) Why is it important to recognize that Christians are disciples (there is no distinction between those two categories)?
- 2) What would make us truly unworthy to be disciples?
- 3) How do we become disciples?
- 4) In what ways do we learn from Jesus?
- 5) How does a life of following Jesus look distinct from the typical American life?
- 6) Who are you praying for that you would like to see become a disciple?