

“Is There Room in Your Boat?”

Luke 5:1-11

First Presbyterian Church
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Let's begin this morning with a show of hands. How many of you have ever been fishing? How many of you have some really good “fish stories”? How many of you have embellished at least one really good fish story? **Someone once said that the only thing that casts doubt on the miracles of Jesus is that they were all witnessed by fisherman.**

Well, this morning we have what is truly one of the remarkable fishing stories of all time. We are going to look at it from a horizontal perspective and then we will turn vertical to see three lessons the Lord has for us this morning.

So let's begin with some background.

Lake of Gennesaret is also called the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberias. It is the largest freshwater lake in Israel and the lowest freshwater lake in the world. At almost 700 feet below sea level, it is second only to the salty Dead Sea. Becky and I were blessed with a trip to Israel a short time ago. And we were able to go out on a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

It was pretty spectacular. It was magical to consider the things that Christ did on and around this sea: the **Sermon on the Mount, Walking on the water, calming the sea and feeding the five thousand** are but a few.

This lake is fed by **underground springs**. It is rich in varieties of fish. **The towns** around the Sea of Galilee had **names that reflected** fishing's importance to their economy and daily life. **Tarichaea**, one of the villages on the lake, **means “The place of salt fish”**. It was probably a town where people were employed in packing and exporting fish to Rome. **Bethsaida** meant “fish town”. At least four of Christ's disciples were fishermen who came from this one town.

The historian Josephus reported that as many as **230 boats** could be working the lake at any given time. The **prime fishing time** was at **night** along the **banks** of the lake.

The type fishing that is described in this story was practiced for thousands of years. Fishermen from one boat would lay out a semi-circular wall of nets (called Trammel nets). They were only 70 to 100 yards from shore.

Then in the shallow water closer to shore, the other fishermen would make noise, splashing the water driving **schools of fish** away from the bank **and into**

the nets. Trammel nets had three layers of netting. They would ensnare the fish and keep them in place until the nets were hauled into the boat.

This method worked best at night. During the day the sun would pierce the surface. **The nets would stand out in the shallower water. In the darkness the fish could not see the cotton netting.**

Now I know that at least some of you are asking yourselves “why is Barry going into so much detail?” And that’s a good question.

The answer is that I want **to be sure we understand** that this **Sea of Galilee**, this Lake of Genessaret, **is where Simon Peter lived and worked.** It was his **home.** It was Simon Peter’s **world**, it was **his living**, It was **his job.** It was **his life.** He was not fishing for the sport of it as many of us do.

By all accounts he was relatively wealthy. He and Andrew his brother were partners along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. This was their business too.

In our passage we see that **he had spent the entire night** on the water but had come up **empty handed.** I’d suppose he was **not in the best mood** as he cleaned his boat and dried and folded his nets. He had **no catch to take to market.** He had no income for the day. He was facing **another night of laboring** with his nets to make up for his bad night on the water.

As our narrative continues, we find Jesus nearby on the shore. He was preaching to a crowd that was “pressing in on him to hear the Word of God.”

Peter was near enough to hear Jesus as he spoke to the crowd. We should remember that Simon Peter had already met Jesus. Andrew had introduced them. And in Chapter 4 of Luke’s gospel, we see that Jesus went into Simon Peter’s home and healed Peter’s mother-in-law. We know from the other Synoptic Gospels that Peter had heard Jesus teach and had even followed him for a while. So it is not as if this was Simon’s first glimpse of Jesus. He was not unfamiliar with Him but thus far his encounters with Christ were short of life changing.

Do you know anyone like that? They know about Christ? They know some of Christ’s teaching? They may even have grown up in a church, or go to church now, but so far....like Peter.....their encounters with Christ have not been life changing? They’ve not had that personal encounter with Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world? Their familiarity with Christ actually stands in the way of seeing Christ as Savior. Often those who grow up thinking they are Christians because their parents were are the most difficult converts. Coming to Christ is a most personal experience. Faith in Christ is not inherited or gained by some kind of osmosis from one’s father or mother.

Well, Jesus paused in the middle of his teaching. He walked over to the two fishing boats and got into Peter's boat. He asked Peter to push off a bit from the shore so that he could move away from the pressing crowd. Peter was not there to hear this Rabbi teach. He was working, cleaning and drying and folding his nets. But putting the boat back on the water so close to the shore was really no big deal. The boat was empty, there were no fish to clean. Peter shoved off.

In the boat it was easier for Jesus to be seen and heard. The hillside served as a type of amphitheatre. Once Peter had rowed the boat into position, the Scripture says that Jesus "sat down and taught the people from the boat."

When Jesus finished teaching, He turns to Peter and says "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch". And this is where it gets really interesting. This is where our story turns from the horizontal to the vertical. This is where we see Jesus coming to Peter where he grew up, where he lives, and where he works. He is about to reveal Himself to Peter as Sovereign Lord. Sovereign over everything in Peter's life....everything.

The Scripture says that Simon Peter responded, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

Now let me paraphrase Peter's response because this surely was not what Peter was thinking:

What was Jesus profession? What was he trained in?.....a Carpenter!
And now what was Jesus doing?.....teaching about
God, he was a theologian!

What was Peter's profession?.....a fisherman.
A professional fisherman.
A successful professional fisherman.

So what do you think Peter was thinking? We know what he said but what was he thinking.....

I rather think that Peter was thinking something like this:

Teacher, I've heard you before and you seem to be a very good teacher. I don't understand everything you say but then, I'm not a teacher, I'm just a fisherman. I just know how to fish. You know how to teach. We fished all night. We caught nothing. You cannot catch fish during the day and you certainly can't catch fish in the deep water. What you're asking us to do is idiotic. You ought to stick with teaching, but then, I'm just a fisherman. What do I know? We'll go to the deep water and let down our nets but it's going to be your reputation, not mine.

Well, not only did Peter catch fish, but he had to call to the other boat to come and help. Even at that their boats almost sank under the weight of the catch. They had to be astonished.

Isn't it interesting, however, what we don't see? We don't see celebration and high fives. We don't see the fishermen jubilant over their massive catch. Instead they were so astonished they just sat there in amazement. And then we see Peter, the career fisherman, the calloused, sun weathered man's man falling at Jesus' knees begging him, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Luke 5:8

When the boats finally do get to shore with the catch, Scripture says that "they left everything and followed Him." They left the boats. They left this magnificent catch of fish. They left their jobs. They left their homes and apparently their families. This is quite a 'fish story'!!

There are three wonderful lessons from this passage of Scripture that I want to give you this morning **but** first I want to be sure we know **two things that this passage does not teach:**

First, this passage does not teach that if you obey and follow Jesus, he will literally fill your nets. There is no guarantee of health, wealth and prosperity in becoming a Christian. Jesus' purpose in performing this miracle was not to provide an economic boon to Peter, Andrew, James and John and their families.

Secondly, this passage does not teach that if you choose to follow Jesus that you must leave your family, your home and your business and become a missionary.

Jesus voluntarily took on our flesh. He was limited in space and time just as we are. In order for Peter to follow him, Peter had to literally go with him wherever he went.

But when Jesus ascended into Heaven after His resurrection, the Holy Spirit came and He lives in the heart of every believer. So wherever we are, Jesus is present. We are literally the Body of Christ on this planet. Our Triune God is 'Coram Deo', always present with us and in us. We now follow Him by allowing Him to lead us in every moment of every day. Regardless of where we are or what we are doing He calls us to follow Him where we are, where we live, where we work.

So...the three lessons from this passage for this morning are these:

First, we have a Sovereign God. Jesus got into Peter's boat. Peter didn't invite Him.

Jesus preached to the pressing crowd but he got into Peter's boat. The real reason he was there that day on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, was to call Peter to follow Him. He'd come to catch Peter. And catch him he did. He showed Peter that not only did he know Peter's business but he was the Lord of his business, He was the Lord of everything. He was the Lord of the boat and Lord of the sea and Lord of the catch.

C.S. Lewis called the Holy Spirit the "hound of heaven" because he experienced the relentless love and call of God almost at every turn. God called C.S. Lewis in every area of his life, even where he worked. God is relentless in pursuing those He calls in to faith.

Everyone who has come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ has a story. Everyone going deeper in Christ has stories All are deeply personal. Each is different.

As Lord of Heaven and earth, Jesus will take the physical things that we are so concerned about and turn them in such a way that they become spiritual lessons. He will take the things that are personally important to us and turn them in order to get our attention or draw us deeper in to relationship with Him.

He'll take our health and turn it a bit causing us to see more clearly our mortality and our need to turn to the great physician who is Lord of life.

He'll take our stable jobs and careers, turn them a bit so that our definition of success, a full net, changes. We begin to live according to God's economy. Scripture says it is the Lord who gives you the power to get wealth in the first place.

He'll take stable marriages and relationships and turn them a bit and we realize that relationships take hard work and communication and spiritual connection.....and most of all, those relationships need Jesus in the middle of them for them to be healthy and vibrant and lasting. He is Lord of relationships too.

Our God is Sovereign. Like a shepherd after his lost sheep, He will find you where you live, where you work, where you play, yes, even where you hide.

Lesson two, when Jesus gets into your boat, make room for Him.

Many years ago Oswald Chambers said to a group of students in a college chapel service:

“We have to learn to make room for God...to give God ‘elbow room’. We calculate and estimate, and say that this and that will happen, and we forget to make room for God to come as he chooses. Expect him to come, but do not expect him only in a certain way. At any moment he may break in. Always be in a state of expectancy, and leave room for God to come as he likes.”

Is there room in your boat?

In Peter’s case, he was discovering the real Christ for the first time. Up until now, Peter had been an onlooker. Yes, Jesus had healed his mother-in-law and Peter had heard Jesus teach. But here, Christ demonstrates His sovereignty over Peter’s life and affairs and even the sea and the fish. For the first time Peter sees Christ for who he is. The Lord of heaven and earth, and he says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”

Peter sees his own sin in the light of Christ’s Holiness. It is at that moment when Peter came to the realization of his sinful condition and his need for a Savior. Is there room in your boat?

Throughout Scripture we see those entering the presence of God’s holiness.

When **David** repented of his sins of adultery and murder he said “Have mercy on me, O God.....For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.”

When **Isaiah** heard the words of the seraphim saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory...”

Isaiah replied, “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!”

When John was given his vision and saw Christ he said, “I fell at his feet as though dead..... But he laid his right hand on me saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore....”

And when Peter saw Christ clearly, he said “Depart from me for I am a sinful man”, **Jesus said to Peter**, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.”

When you make room for Jesus in your boat, when you make room in your heart, you will see clearly your need for a savior. You will see his involvement in your life. Just like Peter. And you will see that forgiveness

is available by God's grace, through faith and that it is a gift found in His son.

The third lesson can only be seen by fast forwarding in Peter's life.

When Scripture says that Peter "left everything and followed Him" we know that wasn't the end of the story.

- Peter **did** follow Jesus. For the better part of three years Peter followed Jesus. Town to town, village to village, city to city.
- It is Peter who would declare that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
- It was Peter who walked on the water of this very Sea of Galilee.
- It is Peter who drew the sword and struck the high priest's servant when they arrested Jesus in the Garden.
- When Jesus had gone through His trials and was headed toward the cross, it was Peter who denied three times that he ever knew Jesus.

I can't help but weep with Peter over this. Jesus got in Peter's boat and Peter wanted to withdraw from Jesus' presence because of his sin. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid." Now, having denied Jesus three times, how utterly shameful Peter must have felt once again. And upon Jesus crucifixion, he must have felt truly alone and faithless, abandoned and having no way to repair the breach.

Simon Peter returned to Galilee.

We pick up the story in the 21st Chapter of John. We see that Peter and several of the disciples were together near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They'd seen the risen Christ but were once again alone. One evening as the sun was setting, Peter announced to the other disciples with him "I am going fishing". And so Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee and two others went with him.

Peter had come full circle. Peter needed familiarity and security. The one whom he'd followed, the one whom he loved, the one whom he had come to call Lord was no longer with him. Peter was grieving His absence. Peter needed relief and so he returned to what was most familiar to him.

They went out to fish that night but caught nothing just as they had caught nothing several years before when Jesus filled their nets

Just as day was breaking, the risen Jesus stood on the shore. The disciples did not know it was Jesus. He called to them, "Children, do you have any fish?"

They answered him, "No." He said to them "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."

So they cast it on the right side. They were unable to haul the net in because of the fish. John turned to Peter and said, "It is the Lord."

When Peter heard it was the Lord, he threw himself into the sea and swam to shore to meet His Lord and his Savior. He couldn't wait for the boat to return to shore. He couldn't wait to be in Jesus' presence. Jesus knew Peter's heart. He knew the words Peter needed to hear.

It was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee after they had eaten breakfast that Jesus graciously and lovingly asked Peter three times "Do you love me?" In this Jesus erased Peter's denials. Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." And after saying all of this, Jesus said to Peter "Follow me."

The third lesson is this: When Christ gets in your boat. And you've made room for Him, He won't get out.

Jesus said, "I am with you always." Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus said, "No one can snatch you out of my hand." When you come to Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you have as much of Christ as you ever will. He has made sure of that. The question is how much of you have you given to Christ.

Is there room in your boat?