

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 10, 2019

“Fish Stories.”

Luke 5:1-11

Two guys go on a fishing trip. They rent all the equipment: the reels, the rods, the wading suits, the rowboat, the car, and even a cabin in the woods. They spent a fortune.

The first day they go fishing they don't catch a thing. The same thing happens on the second day and the third day. It goes on like this until, finally, on the last day of their vacation, one of the men finally catches a fish.

As they drive home, they are both really depressed. One turns to the other and says, “Do you realize that this one lousy fish cost us \$1,500? “Wow,” says the other, “It's a good thing we didn't catch any more!”

Another one. A cold winter day. An old man walked out onto a frozen lake, cut a hole in the ice, dropped in his fishing line, and waited patiently for a bite. He was there for almost an hour, without even a nibble, when a young boy walked out on the ice, cut a hole in the ice next to him. The boy dropped his fishing line and minutes later he took a largemouth bass. The old man could not believe his eyes but chalked it up to plain luck.

Shortly thereafter, the young boy pulled out another large catch. He kept catching fish after fish. Finally, the old man couldn't take it any longer. “Son,” he said, “I have been here for over an hour without even a nibble. You have been here only a few minutes and have caught a half dozen fish! Ho do you do it?”

The boy responded, “Roo raf roo reep ra rums rarrm.”

“What was that?” the old man asked. Again the boy responded, “Roo raf roo reep ra rums rarm.”

“Look,” said the old man, “I can't understand a word you're saying.” The boy leaned over brought his hand to his mouth and spat out a mess of bait. He said again, “You have to keep the worms warm.”

Our scripture for today is a fish story to write home about. It contains the sting of disappointment, as well as the adrenalin of success. Peter, James and John are washing their nets from a bad night of fishing when Jesus comes along and swipes one of their boats to use for a pulpit. When the sermon is finished, Jesus says to Peter, “Put into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Can you imagine the look on Peter's face? Here's a carpenter telling the Zebedee Fish Market crew how to catch fish. Besides they've been fishing all night, which is the time to fish, in the shallow water where fish are usually found and now they are enduring that painful question that people always pose to fishermen. “Are you catching anything?”

No wonder Peter is less than enthusiastic in his obedience. “Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” Of course, you know the rest of the story. They catch so many fish that their nets begin to break and they have to call for help. I will not try to explain the miracle. I only invite you to embrace the message. Since we are talking of fishing in shallow water, the disciples stepped into the kiddie pool of God's grace by listening to Jesus' message and obeying Jesus request, but have yet to experience the thrill of diving deeper. They got their feet wet but have not yet known the joy of having their souls soaked.

So many of us are in the kiddie pool. Is Jesus calling you into deeper water? What are the signs that signal the time for a move? Are you willing to obey—to go with him all the way?

One nudge to deeper waters may be a disappointment. “Lord, we've worked all night and caught nothing.” Or as I hear it expressed, “I've been faithful for years, what difference has it made?” Do you feel that way? Is your religion a load or a lift?

We start the Christian life with high hopes and great expectations. We believe God can do anything but fail—then illness strikes, divorce happens, death comes, jobs disappear, and God doesn't seem so mighty anymore. Today we are torn between the desire to quit and the courage to carry on. Or we've given ourselves to church service and invested our energy in church systems. We've endured our blows from church politics. It's all taken a toll. We've hurt so much that we've become uncaring, unconcerned, unexcited, unmoved, and untouched. Today we feel like the apathetic owl who just doesn't give a hoot anymore.

Another nudge to deeper waters may be desire. There is a spiritual hunger in America for authentic spirituality. In the deeper waters there are mysteries to be explored, wonders to be experienced, breath-taking views of a better life. Like the curious explorers on their first scuba dive, we are anxious to see what lies below the surface of our faith.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.” Happy are those who have a deep desire to know God. They won't be disappointed. It might be a small group of youth, it might be a prayer group that you are in or it could be a Sunday school class. Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for God. God will honor them. Are you being called to push out into the deeper waters of faith and explore the mysteries of His grace?

In verse eight we read, “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knee and said, “Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man.” Someone said that confession is good for the soul. It always is. The closer we get to God, the more conscious we are of our shortcomings as human beings. There are some things confession is not.

A confession is not blabbing our secrets. If talking about sin was the same as confessing our sins, our society would be on a confessional binge. No people on earth has let it all hang out the way we do. Celebrities and politicians race each other to the publishers with their tell-all manuscripts under their arms playing to a public that can hardly wait to read the sordid details of another’s affair.

If confession is not blabbing our secrets or explaining our sins, then what is it?

Confession is being honest. We can’t expect God to cover what we are not willing to uncover. The first step of confession is owning where the real problem lies, and then to face it. Get on your knees and bring your sins to the Lord and leave them there. Only then can God’s grace come to you and change you. Confession is being humble. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up in the temple and his immediate response is “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.” God’s healing grace will forgive.

“Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid, from now on you will catch men and women.’ So, when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.” Which is more the miracle here? The incredible catch of fish or the incredible catch of these men? They drop it all, give it all up—their business, their home, their way of life, and, if tradition is correct, their very lives themselves—all to follow Jesus. To “catch people.” And down through two centuries of Christian history, that is how every generation of followers of Jesus have understood our calling—to catch people.

There are several ways to interpret that phrase—“catch people.” We could think of ourselves as the ones casting the nets—we spread the word far and wide in hopes that we will bring in another huge catch like the one that day at the lake Gennesaret. Or we could think of ourselves as the net—we are the instrument the Lord uses to gather them in. But I’m convinced that we best think of ourselves as the bait. Unless they are born into the fellowship of the church, something attracts them, the bait, and most often it is you and me. Four out of five new church members say they decided to join because someone, a friend or a relative, first invited them. For good or bad, we are bait. Make sure it’s warm. The good news is that they are biting out there. They are biting.

You see, somewhere out on Lake Galilee, a handful of fishermen were transformed in such a way that they would eventually change the world because Christ had come and gave them a mission for eternity. The mission is ours.