**From Now On, You Will Catch Men**

Luke 5-1:11

Key verse 5:10b-11 – *“Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”*

Over the last few weeks, we have studied the beginnings of Jesus’ earthly ministry. His purpose in coming into our world had been perfectly described by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier as a great cause for celebration and jubilation. As it is written in Isaiah 61:1-2; **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** Indeed, Jesus was ushering a new era for God’s people through the power of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins and offering the grace of salvation through the cross. In last Sunday’s passage, the people of Capernaum received and experienced a tiny portion of the Lord’s favour yet it was enough for them to desperately try to keep Jesus from leaving. However, Jesus replied, **“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”** As we will learn today, Jesus did not intend to do this all on his own for this would be the time when He called others to follow Him and be His disciples.

**Part 1 – Put out into Deep Water**

Even at the very start of His ministry, wherever Jesus went, a great crowd followed. Word spread of His powerful teachings that resonated deeply in the hearts of the people as well as the healing of many sick, infirmed and even the demon-possessed. In those dark times, they all flocked to Him with their near-endless list of needs. Yet Jesus did not turn them away. Like a good shepherd, He cared for them by giving them the most important thing man needs to live on; the living words of God. Even while being pressed by the crowd to the water’s edge, Jesus got onto a boat and put out a little from the shore in order that those same life-giving words would be heard by all who had gathered.

Jesus was also paying special attention to the owner of the boat, Simon. Simon had been following Jesus for about a year. In that time he invited Jesus to his house, spent some time with Him and Jesus even healed Simon’s mother-in-law from a terrible fever. But Simon was content with being only a part-time disciple. On the surface, it is quite understandable; he has a job to do, taxes to pay and a family to take care of. On a deeper level though, he neither had a deep relationship with Jesus, nor did he have the desire to have one. If we think about modern-day North America, there are many nominal Christians who have grown up hearing about Jesus, learning stuff about Jesus and proudly identify themselves as Christians. Yet when we look at their lives, and even our own, there is no discernible difference compared to everybody else. Christ is limited to someone we pay a little bit of attention to on Sundays (if there is nothing else urgent going on) or holidays like Christmas and Easter only. Though we profess Christ as our Lord, we live like He barely exists and are content to keep Him at a distance so that He does not “interfere” with the other important aspects of our lives such as our relationships, our workplaces and our personal interests.

So, it is quite fitting, we find Simon washing his nets after a long, arduous but unsuccessful night of fishing. Even though he must have felt a little disappointed, Peter allows Jesus to use his boat out of respect for Jesus. But once Jesus finished preaching to the crowd, He commands Peter, **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”** It was a lot easier to honour the first request but now Jesus appears to be asking for too much from Peter. Why should Peter even have to listen to Jesus? Peter had already spent all night yet caught nothing so how would dropping the nets in the worst possible place and at the worst possible time yield a different outcome?

In many ways, Peter’s situation is similar to our own lives. We all know who Jesus is and experienced many wondrous blessings thanks to Him. We owe everything, even our very lives to Him. Yet we place all our time and energy on our earthly responsibilities like family, work and our studies. We give Christ the scraps that are left over out of obligation, with no strong commitment to following and serving Jesus. But just like with Peter there comes a time when Jesus asks each and everyone one of us to put out into deep water.

What does “put out into deep water” even mean? It can have many meanings but I would like to focus on two in particular; the first is making a conscious decision to accept Jesus words and the second is to trust in Him completely. When Jesus commands Peter to put out into deep water and let his net down, it was the first recorded command Jesus ever gave Peter. It almost seems as if Jesus issued a challenge or a dare to Peter and it is also hard to imagine Peter, knowing his headstrong and fiery personality, obeying such a command like this one. Even his response in verse 5a show how difficult it was to follow through; **Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.”** However, he did not let failure, fatigue or his own pride prevent him from obeying Jesus’ command;”**But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”** At first glance, it looks as if the only reason Peter let down the nets was because Jesus forced him to but the more we think about it, the more Peter’s trust in Jesus becomes more evident. Peter did not let down his nets simply because Jesus coerced him to but because he must have remembered all the things Jesus had done already. The very same man who was giving him the command was the same who made the blind see, the deaf hear and the lame walk. The very same lips that uttered the order were the same that rebuked the fever right out of Peter’s own mother-in-law. Even though he was unsure of what exactly was about to happen, Peter placed all his trust in Jesus and in doing so, his personal relationship with Jesus deepened. It is not easy to determine which came first; the obedience or the faith but we can see them working together to bring Peter closer to Jesus.

The same applies to us. Jesus does not want a little bit of your time, money or energy. Nor does He want you to serve Him out of obligation or resignation. By calling each and every one of us put out into deep water, Jesus challenges us to deepen our relationship with Him, to listen and place our entire trust in Him. It is not easy to go into deep water. It is dark, mysterious, and terrifying because we have no idea how wide it is, how far down it goes, what lies at the very depths and whether there is even anything there at all to begin with. Nonetheless, Jesus wants us to obey and believe in Him. In doing so, we get the opportunity to experience something truly amazing similar to what follows next.

Verses 6-7 go as follows; **“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”** Jesus had told Simon to let down his net in full expectation of a catch. Now Simon and his partners had so much fish they almost could not make it back to shore. Likewise when we entrust everything to Jesus, He gives us everything we need and a whole lot more. He provides us even with the things we do not even ask for but freely lavishes them upon us as our Heavenly Father. Thus, I pray we may surrender our burdens and duties in life to the Lord, boldly going into deeper waters of faith like Peter so that we may each experience the unfathomable depths of His richness and goodness.

**Part 2 – From Now On, You Will Fish For Men**

What kind of response do you have when something unbelievably amazing happens in your life? Joyous? Ecstastic? Super-duper happy? However, Simon’s response is the exact opposite; full of fear, trembling and woe. In Verse 8, “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”** Shouldn’t Simon be happy? In that moment, he probably caught the most fish he ever did in his entire life. Surely, he had enough to feed his family, pay his taxes and have a little left over to get his mother-in-law something special. Yet Simon responded in this way because he had just encountered the Holy God through this miracle and recognized exactly where he stood before God. In the presence of the Holy God, Peter realised his own weakness, sinfulness and how undeserving he was of this blessing. Usually when we receive a blessing from the Lord, we feel like we deserved it or did something to earn it due to some good quality we have or deed we performed. But when we truly stand before the Lord, we quickly realize how far short we fall. Even Paul, who was one of the most righteous of all men, could only look at himself in horror and disgust when he thought about all his past achievements. As he sharply points out in Romans 3:10-12, **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”**

Yet Jesus does not rebuke him for all these. Instead, He comforts him and says , **“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”** Older translations have some variation of “you will catch men” or “you will be fishers of men.” Rather than list all of Peter’s weaknesses and shortcomings, Jesus reveals to Simon the dual motive behind this miracle; to unveil His identity as God and to call Simon to discipleship. Peter would no longer be following Jesus on his own terms, schedule and convenience like before but as one of Jesus’ disciples. He outwardly had none of the qualifications, the skills or the qualities necessary but Jesus chooses him nonetheless. In the period of less than a day, Peter has gone from inviting Jesus onto his boat as a favour to a friend to being invited as a pioneering member of Jesus’ ministry, eventually becoming one of the most important men in all of history.

However, there is even deeper meaning in Jesus’ words. Jesus did not call them “fishers of men” as a way of being clever with words but as a vivid illustration of their new identities and calling in life. Simon and his partners were fishermen by trade. They relied on this to support their family and drew quite a bit of their sense of self from being fishermen. So they poured their hearts into learning and mastering all the techniques needed to be great fishermen. Now Jesus completely transformed the meaning and purpose of their fishing. In the past, they needed a lot of determination to find and catch fish. Now they would need an even greater amount of determination and strength to bring people into the kingdom of God. In the past, they put so much teamwork and sacrifice into their fishing. Once again, they would need more but this time, it would be going towards preaching and helping others come to know Christ. Jesus planned on taking every skill, talent and characteristic they had and focus them into the direction that glorified God. The fishermen’s response was immediate; upon hearing Jesus’ words, they got out of their boats, left everything and followed Him.

May we all hear Jesus’ voice saying “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” I pray we may truly accept His call to discipleship, following in Jesus’ footsteps and being deeply rooted in Him, experiencing all the wonders and joys of a life dedicated to Christ.