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Cast Your Net

Luke 5:1-11

Today we continue our series where we explore stories of Jesus that take place on the water. Turns out Jesus spent a lot of time in boats and on beaches. The story we read today takes place on a lake called Gennesaret. Let me just launch right into it:

"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, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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." (Luke 5:1-3)

For what happens next, I'm going to need some help telling the story. Would some kids please come up here and help me? I have a little gift for you if you can!

Kids Sermon

Please imagine with me that this thrust is our boat, and that you're now sitting in the boat with Simon and Jesus. So, as we just heard, Jesus had been teaching from this boat because of the crowds (can you say hello to the crowds? Give them a wave!). After he was done teaching, he told Simon to push out the boat from the shore and let down his net to catch fish. There was only one problem. Simon and his friends had already been fishing all night and had caught nothing.

On this side of our "boat" I have a "net" for fishing. This is the net that Simon and his friends used that night. Can someone pull up that net? What's in it? Nothing! Aw, isn't that disappointing? Can you imagine fishing for hours and that's all you get? Can you imagine Jesus telling you to give it one more try anyway? What would you think about Jesus? Would you think he's mean? Or maybe that he's a bit silly thinking there's going to be more fish? Here's exactly what Simon said "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

It sounds like Simon had his doubts, huh? But he trusts Jesus anyway and does what he asks him to do, doesn't he? So, on the other side of our "boat" I have another net. This is the one Jesus told Simon to cast. Can you pull that one up? No?!?! Is it really heavy?!?! I wonder what's in it? Pull! Pull! Oh my goodness, fish! Swedish fish! So many of them! The Bible says that when Simon pulled up the net there was so many fish the boat started sinking and the nets almost broke! They actually had to call another boat over and the fish filled both of the boats! You'll each get to take one of them with you when we're done but I have one more question for you: What do you think Simon's reaction was after he pulled this net from the water? Was he surprised? What if I told you that Simon was afraid! He actually told Jesus to go away because he was so afraid! Here's what he said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Does that seem like a strange reaction to you? But here's what Jesus says to him: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Isn't that nice? Jesus told him not to be afraid, but then Jesus turned Simon from a fisherman into a manfisherman. Okay, we have lots more to say about this, but thank you for helping me tell the story guys! Take a fish with you! Let's thank the kids for their help.

Okay, so there's three questions I think Jesus is asking Simon, and us, in this story: Do you trust me? Do you know who I am, really? Do you want to change? Most importantly, as we see Jesus three things, I want you

to put yourself in Simon's shoes. So several times, we're going to imagine what it's like to be Simon because I think we are not so different from Simon after all. Ready?

Okay, so about that first thing, Jesus' unusual request to cast the net again. Let's talk about what we know about Simon. First of all, we know that Simon had already had Jesus heal his mother-in-law. In just the previous chapter, we hear the story of Jesus visiting Simon's house and curing his mother-in-law of a high fever. So Jesus and Simon were friends, they'd had time to hang out, Jesus had been in Simon's house, had met his family, had even done something really amazing for Simon and his family in curing his mother-in-law. So when Jesus asks Simon to use his boat for teaching, there's some relationship there. Some level of trust.

But when Jesus asks him to push off and cast the net, I think that strains that trust. Think about it. Simon's been up all night long fishing, he's staying up so that Jesus can preach using his boat. He's probably tired, probably disappointed he didn't get fish, then Jesus asks him to do something that just... doesn't... make sense. If you've been fishing all night, when it's more likely to get fish closer to the surface of the water, why would it make any sense at all that there'd be more fish? What if Simon had cast the net, and there hadn't been any fish? Simon would have wasted his time and would have probably felt like an idiot. Jesus asks Simon to do something that, on the face of it, seems like nonsense, and maybe even a little mean.

Now, here's where I want you to put yourself in Simon's shoes and ask yourself, "Does Jesus ever ask me to do something that seems like nonsense on the face of it?" The answer is, absolutely! One of the greatest things that Jesus asks us to do is to believe that he is the Son of God, and for those of us who have believed that for a long time we have forgotten how big of a step that is. But I know that there are some of you here who maybe have not quite taken that step of believing Jesus is God is. To believe that a man is also God? I recognize for some of you that sounds like nonsense... but it's what Jesus asks us to do.

And if you are a follower of Jesus, you do believe that he is God, you still have to wrestle with how he tells us to live. Just take a gander at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and 6 to see what I mean. He tells us to not hit someone back when they slap you, but even give them the other cheek. To pray in a closet. To not be anxious. To love our enemies. I've even had someone who believes in Jesus ask me, "Jesus doesn't actually expect us to do all that, does he?" Why yes, he does! And on the face of it, it seems like nonsense. I think many believers try and ignore how radical Jesus was, try to rationalize it, but we don't realize that Jesus puts all of us in the same position, whether you follow him or not, to just trust him. To trust him. Even though it's not explicit in the text, I think we're left hearing Jesus as us and Simon, "Do you trust me?"

Trust is one of the most important basis of relationship. It's pretty clear in the story that Simon had some level of trust. He'd seen Jesus heal, he'd heard his teaching. So even though you could tell in what he says that he's a little skeptical, he still calls Jesus "Master." "Even though what you're asking me to do doesn't make sense," he seems to be saying, "I'll put my trust in you."

I don't think any of you would be here if you didn't trust Jesus at some level. Maybe you're like Simon at this point in the story, you've heard he's a teacher, you've seen he's a healer, so you're willing to be around him. But if you're around Jesus long enough, he's going to test your trust. He's going to call on you to step out and trust him, like he did Simon. Why? Because he wants us to know him.

Have you ever wondered it would be like to encounter Jesus? Like to really meet Jesus face to face? What if he walked into this room right now? I wonder if we'd imagine it would be like this: (Wayne's World clip 1:30)

Do we treat Jesus like he's a rock star? Even though Wayne and Garth are bowing to Alice Cooper, at best they are merely admiring Alice Cooper. If you're paying attention in the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels, you'll know that there are several occasions where his disciples get to really know Jesus, often on the water

as it turns out, and they don't merely admire him. They are afraid. In fact, Simon's reaction mirrors a story in the Old Testament, the story of Isaiah seeing God's throne. Listen to that story and tell me if you see the similarity.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 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!"

Do you hear how they are so similar? Simon's reaction is almost the same as Isaiah's. And even though Simon ends up kneeling in a pile of fish, I would argue that both Simon and Isaiah saw the same thing: the glory of the God.

Now let me tell you something about glory. I replaced the lights in my master bath recently with LEDs because they have been burning out every three months or so, but I noticed that these LEDs are soft white light. If you know anything about lighting you know that the brighter and whiter the light, the uglier you look in it. Seriously! Bright, white light makes your imperfections clearer, makes the shadows on your face darker. When you're doing your makeup, you want bright, white light, but when you're doing a photo shoot you want soft, warm light.

It's as if when Simon saw the miracle that Jesus had done, and he no longer saw merely a teacher or a healer, he saw glorious light. He looked at him and saw that bright, white light shining on himself and said, "How could someone so pure, so good, so glorious, even come near a screwup like me." Now I'm not claiming that Simon actually had a vision like Isaiah did, but I am claiming that Simon's heart was open to the absolute purity and goodness of Jesus, that Simon recognized that Jesus was someone way more important and special than merely a teacher and a healer. "Master" didn't cut it anymore. Now to Simon, Jesus was "Lord."

So, to us Jesus is asking through this story, "Do you know who I am, really?" Is Jesus merely a rock star? A healer? A teacher? Or is he Lord, someone so glorious in his purity, his beauty, his love, his goodness, that all you can do is fall on your knees before him?

There's one little detail to this text that you may not have noticed, but in order to move on I want to point out to you. Do any of you know who Simon is? The name on Simon's birth certificate would have been Simon Bar-jona, but we would know him better by the nickname that Jesus gave him: "Petra," which means Rock. We call him Peter. You may have noticed that I haven't called him Peter throughout this story, because Luke doesn't call him Peter. That is, not until he falls on his knees and says, "Depart from me..." And after this story, Luke doesn't call Simon "Simon" anymore, he then becomes "Peter." Now, there's always a danger of reading too much into a detail like this, but I really do think Luke may be trying to say something here. I think Luke is telling an origin story.

You guys know that comic book movies are all the rage right now. There's one out practically every month lately. And many of those comic book movies begin with an origin story, and many of these origin stories are ingrained into our cultural psyche. [Slideshow of movie posters] We know how Peter Parker gets bit by a radioactive spider and becomes Spiderman. Billionaire Bruce Wayne falls into a cave of bats and becomes Batman. T'challa, prince of Wakanda's father is assassinated and becomes Black Panther. I'm getting some blank looks on that one. Well, you seriously need to go check out Black Panther. Anyway, this story in Luke 5,

I believe, is Luke's version of how Simon, the regular old fisherman, becomes Peter, the manfisherman, the disciple of Jesus. It's his origin story, and it all begins when Peter knows, really knows, who Jesus is.

You see, when Peter kneels down in front of Jesus he knows life can't be the same anymore. Something has to change, even if all that means is that Jesus leaves. But Jesus doesn't want to leave. Instead, Jesus gives Peter a career change. And Jesus changes Peter. I think when we read about Peter's origin story, from mild mannered fisherman Simon to evangelist extraordinaire Peter, we hear Jesus asking us, "Do you want to change?"

Jesus isn't Alice Cooper. He doesn't just want fans who admire him. Jesus wants people who trust him, who see him for who he really is, and then who are changed by the whole experience. I believe Jesus wants us all to have our own little origin stories when we trust him and know him for who he is.

I'm passionate about change, because I have my own origin story. I wouldn't be standing here talking to you today if I hadn't had my own encounter with Jesus. That wouldn't surprise you, but I'm often in awe of how God changed me. At the age of 15 or 16, I was so painfully shy I would panic about having to check my books out at the library because it meant I would have to interact with the librarian. And my guess is that if Jesus hadn't met me around that age, I would probably be addicted, isolated and alone. That was the trajectory of my life. But then I had a friend who invited me to a little youth group. And I saw in my friend the joy and peace of Jesus. And in that light, I saw my own misery, my bitterness, my anger, my inability to interface with other human beings. And I didn't want that anymore. I recall the day I knelt down in my room and began a prayer, more or less, "I am wretched." Sounds like Simon Peter, no? But I asked Jesus, "Please change me. I give you my life, just make me someone new." There wasn't a thunderbolt from heaven at that moment, but I got up from my knees resolved that I had made a commitment, and I trusted Jesus. And I don't know how, but within a year, I was in front of my little church helping to lead worship. I was talking to people. In two years I went on a mission trip to Honduras and was leading the little youth group. God did change me. God is changing me. I'm not the person I was 20 years ago, I'm not even the person I was 10 years or 5 years ago, thanks be to Jesus.

I don't think my story is unique. There are many of you have have trusted Jesus, seen him for who he really is, and have been invited into a life of change. I thank Jesus for your stories too. But I also know there are many here who are stuck. Maybe you trust him enough to say that he's worth listening to, but you haven't yet believed that he is who he says he is. Maybe you haven't yet grappled with his teachings and trusted him enough to live the way he wants you to. You can call him Master, but can you call him Lord? Will you pray with me?