

## The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (B)

### *Fishers of Men*

Luke 5.1-11

January 19, 2020

*Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; <sup>2</sup> and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; <sup>7</sup> so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.*

Today we begin a long look at the Gospels (as usual for THIS part of the year) and especially a look at one very prominent theme in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, i.e. how Jesus Christ shaped the lives of the Twelve Disciples. We started this series last year and hope to finish it between Christmas and Easter of NEXT YEAR.

I want to thank Phil for his fantastic series on the Christ Child – it was a perfect bridge! We saw that Jesus Christ was born and raised under the discipline (“discipleship”) of the cross and He also called His own students into that same discipline/school. So, now we turn to THAT topic: how DID Jesus Christ train the Twelve in the school of the cross: cruciform (“cross-shaped”) training?

In this well-known passage – the calling of the fishermen to become fishers OF men, we see some qualities/features/elements/steps (I hate to use that term) but steps through which Jesus Christ takes all His disciples (both ancient and modern). AND as we’ll see, these steps happen, not once in the spiritual life, but are repeated. Whenever the disciples of Jesus,

ancient and modern, whenever He calls us into a deeper walk/connection/intimacy with Him we go through some process like I'm going to isolate from this famous episode.

There are times in the life of true spirituality that Jesus Christ seems to beckon you or call you, command you to a deeper relationship with Him. In fact, I would venture to say that a lot of people here today, at the start of a new year sense this kind of a beckoning and you're trying to respond to it by reading the Bible more or by committing to some other spiritual practice.

It may help you to see this pattern – NOT only in the lives of these fishermen but even in other Bible characters (e.g. Isaiah)... When God calls you into a deeper place there is very often a pattern that starts with 1) An apparently unreasonable directive 2) A surprising willingness 3) A two-part traumatic encounter 4) A gift of assurance and promise from God.

These components or steps into a deeper walk correspond to the four quotations I highlighted in the printed text. The first, an apparently unreasonable directive/request, is summarized in the words of Jesus to Simon Peter the fisherman: "Launch out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch". And the parallel, the point of comparison to the normal spiritual life is: anyone who connects to or goes deeper with Jesus Christ hears the calling and it sounds counterintuitive or even absurd.

For Peter, it would have been very unusual to take fishing advice from a carpenter! Fishing wasn't a hobby for Simon Peter – it was a living! It was what he knew (multigenerational). Jesus was from Nazareth, a city 20 miles from the water. And all around this Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee) there were fishing villages filled with fishing specialists and if Simon Peter wanted fishing advice, IT WAS ALL AROUND HIM.

And all the advice would have said, "Call it quits! Better luck tomorrow night!" You don't drop your nets in the daytime – you don't have to be a fishing specialist to know that. Even carpenters know that!

And add to that, the fact that these guys are tired! These guys are worn out and after a fruitless night of taking nets up and down – they want to eat and sleep. AND they just finished washing the nets!

And knowing all this, the Rabbi, the Teacher says, "Put out into the deep water and drop your nets for a catch." It must be a test...but...feels kind of cruel. (Like "Abraham, take your son...your ONLY son...")

Now, Simon Peter had known Jesus Christ up to this point. The passage directly before this took place in Simon Peter's home where Jesus Christ healed Peter's mother-in-law and there had been many other encounters as well.

So, Simon Peter was a follower of Jesus Christ and calls Him "Master" and "Lord". He admired Jesus as a Rabbi "but...with all due respect...what does a religious teacher and a carpenter know about fishing?!...He knows about spiritual things but not fishing...and this is, from every indicator, a bad idea!" (Peter was from Bethsaida [Jn 1.44] – "House of Fish"!)

So the fisherman mildly objects to the Rabbi. (And the other fishermen...must be laughing!)

Now, let me suggest that every person who hears the gospel – the basic message of Christianity – when it begins to dawn on you what this means for your life, SOMETHING ABOUT IT SEEMS...LIKE A BAD IDEA. It strikes you, at some point, as unreasonable and ill advised. Just like it did for Peter! And so it is with every subsequent call to a deeper walk.

For some it seems far too easy. There are some people who can only think, "there's no such thing as a free lunch". "I've had to WORK for everything I ever got! And while I may NOT be perfect! I've lived a good life...better than MOST...I'm NOT looking for a handout! I can stand on my own two feet! Free grace just encourages slackers!"

For others it's too hard. One says, "How can I believe this in a scientific age?" OR "The Christians themselves can't even agree!" Another one says, "I just don't feel anything – seems true – but I don't feel it. You have to feel it...right?" Another says, "Isn't the sexual ethic of Christianity totally regressive and outdated? I don't think I could live that way."

Point is, no matter what your culture or upbringing or the period of history when you were born, there will always be something...usually a number of things that strike you as "going against the grain" in the Christian message. Unreasonable and ill advised!

And it may even be that at present, you see yourself as someone who really does admire Jesus Christ...might even identify yourself as a Christian...but now you're reading in the Bible or hearing in a sermon or study - YOU'RE sensing a kind of call to launch out into deeper water...to DO something that you see and really believe IS what this great Teacher...this Master...Jesus Christ wants for you. It's becoming clear that He's inviting you ...beckoning...alluring...calling you to some deeper step. It may be a forgiveness issue.

It may be a greater commitment to the poor and to a more disciplined course of charitable giving (not just when you feel moved). It could be a tangible demonstration of love (like volunteering to help with ESL or being in a Small Group or a Class or membership in a

church). Maybe you're sensing a call to actually identify with Jesus Christ and let your friends or coworkers or family know about it.

AND just as Peter had VOICES...the specialists and professional fishermen all around him saying, "NO! HE IS NOT! He's NOT going to listen to that Rabbi, the Carpenter/in-lander IS he??" And those voices are saying the same thing to YOU: ridiculing, reinforcing the absurdity of Jesus Christ's call.

So that's IT – the gospel and the calling of Jesus Christ strikes us, like it did Simon Peter as strange...as harmful...as counterintuitive and if it's NEVER struck YOU that way...maybe you've never even heard it...or considered it (Luke 8.12).

Second, the unreasonable call meets with a surprising willingness in YOU; the quote, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." – For some inexplicable reason, even in opposition to your inner objections and the voices of the specialists, you find yourself saying, "but I will do as You say."

Despite his intellectual objections (his knowledge of fishing in Galilee) and despite his fears of being ridiculed by other fishermen and despite his own body's extreme weariness...somehow a deeper motivation prevails and Peter finds himself saying, "I will let down the nets..."

And, of course, that deeper motivation is TRUST. Simon Peter has passed some invisible line in his soul and begun to have a greater confidence in this amazing Person, more confidence in Jesus Christ than he has in those other voices...even his own voice.

Maybe Simon Peter is saying, even as he complies with this ridiculous order, saying, "I can't believe I'm DOING this!" But at some deeper level another voice was saying, "Only trust Him – no man ever spoke as He does – He has the words of eternal life...all you have ever truly yearned for is IN Him...He is the Hero of the whole human story...only trust Him."

And OUT of that deeper place, maybe a small and even weak place (the size of a mustard seed) and in simple trust, Peter says, "Master...I will..."

This is really what faith looks like. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel like certainty or proof or even like a good decision. You come to TRUST that He knows/sees even what YOU DON'T.

It feels like you're twisting in the wind...feels like you are bucking the system or acting without knowing/certainty...You can't SEE it (and we LIKE to see it!) But somehow...this Person...you find yourself saying, "He is real...He is true...is TRUSTWORTHY..."

You find yourself...despite objections from others, despite even your own doubts, you find yourself saying, "Lord, I trust YOU more...and I will do as You say..."

Third, the story reaches its climax when after the miraculous haul of fish Simon Peter has had - BY FAITH – had an experiential contact with this amazing Person who commands the fish and upholds all things by the word of His power...and Simon Peter has a realization...an Epiphany and WITH IT, a two-part trauma.

Peter's faith may have been small...but the Ground he was standing on, the Person who was holding him was infinitely strong...stronger than Peter imagined.

First this deeper, wider view of WHO Jesus Christ IS leads to Peter's own self-discovery and that same kind of trauma that Isaiah had, "Woe is me! I'm a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips!" They both get a new view of God and a new view of self.

Simon Peter recognizes that THIS is a supernatural and Holy Being and that HE (Peter) is IN way over his head... he's ill-equipped to stand in the company of this Person. He feels sinful and he expresses it, "Leave me alone – go away from me, Lord...for I'm a sinful man, O Lord."

It's not that Peter has low-self-esteem...or that he's psychologically maladjusted (as we'll see later – Peter's self-esteem is pretty high – Matt 26.33) but that for the first time he's not comparing himself to shades of grey...to relative forms of righteousness...but to the very essence of Purity Himself. Suddenly everything else is dim and the Light is illuminating and exposing everything...including himself – and Peter feels naked and ashamed.

And as in the life of every Christian, the sense that I am sinful and guilty and YET this glorious Being has taken an interest in ME...He's coming after ME...He wants to engage ME... And now I see that life can NEVER BE THE SAME. And for Peter and I think for every Christian, it strikes this kind of fear into us.

Like Isaiah ("woe is me!") and like John the Revelator who fell down like a dead man before the risen Jesus Christ (Rev 1). In all these cases, it's a person getting a real glimpse of God's true nature... and only THEN are we really able to see our own true nature. John Calvin wrote these famous words, "It is evident that a person never comes to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself." Peter says, "You have the wrong man!"

And YET as you read the Gospels (esp. this section in Luke) you'll see: these are just the people Jesus is seeking...people aware of their own guilt, sinners.

And when Peter or Isaiah or John when they see what purity looks like and what THEY themselves ARE and are overcome with fear, THEN, they hear that most welcome Voice, the last of our quotes, Jesus Christ says to the sinful and PETRIFIED PETROS..."Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." (A gift of assurance and promise from God.)

Jesus Christ is saying, "WHAT you feel ...that complete incompatibility between your sinfulness and My purity...that total incongruity between fallen man and Holy God is why I have come – the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world! DO NOT FEAR."

So, Jesus says quickly, as the Father said to the Prodigal Son, "Here is a token of My love – a signet ring, a promise of your belonging...I've come to live and die for you, to INCLUDE you again in My Father's work. I'll make you genuinely concerned for people and you will bring them INTO the Kingdom (filling churches with people as you once filled boats with fish!)...to gather the lost sons and daughters and congregate them INTO the House of Joy."

Luke uses a kind of pun, a compound word, in v. 10, "you will be live-catching people" – as if to say "YOU used to catch live fish and make them dead...now you'll be catching dead men and making them alive... LIFE-CATCHING!" And Peter's words are still bringing people into the boat ('ever notice how churches so often look like boats?).

And this, Jesus Christ says to everyone with just the tiniest faith, "See My majesty and My mission; recognize your sinfulness and your inability but also TRUST that I have come to pay the price...don't try to send Me away...I've come for YOU. Leave the past to Me and join Me in the great harvest of the New Creation...I have come to give you life...and purpose...mission. Come deeper with Me...as absurd as it seems... trust Me as traumatic as it will be... and I will give you My assurance and promise – DO NOT FEAR!"

So, where are YOU? Still offering objections? Waiting for them all to be answered before you launch out deeper with Jesus Christ... As we close in prayer...try to see yourself at some point on this journey...respond to this Amazing Person who calls you into the deep. Don't fear, trust (not in your will-power) but in His promise and assurance. Go deeper. Trust Him