

Fishing story with dad

My dad just wouldn't listen. He thought he knew better. He thought he had a handle on the situation, and in the end, he was left with nothing but the handle of his fishing rod. It's been said, "A bad day of fishing is better than a good day of work" but I'm not sure that's always the case. At least we got to share that fishing experience together.

Last week we looked at Christmas from the eyes of the shepherds, and if you recall, surprisingly, they were chosen to be the very first to hear the good news that a Savior was born. I say "surprisingly" because the shepherds were outcasts – considered to be "no good" by those who claimed to be good, and yet the shepherds – the last to be chosen by men, were the first to be chosen by God to hear the good news. In this birth announcement, the angel told them that this good news would bring great joy and it was for all people. This good news was good for everybody because everybody, without exception, needed a Savior.

It's good news for all, but today, for some people, for some reason, the good news doesn't seem all that good. As I mentioned last week, maybe the original good news that was given by the angel and later by Jesus has been so distorted that it no longer appears to be good for all people – only for some people. Maybe people just don't understand the good news that was given to us. Maybe that's it. Maybe people are relying on their own idea of the good news, their own version of it, generally to excuse their behavior, and therefore, the good news is no longer that good. That happens, but maybe the good news is only good when we realize we are not so good, and in some respects, that's the underlying message of Christmas.

In his quote from the book "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus", which is a collection of Christmas writings by various authors, Tim Keller says, "*Christmas is the end of thinking you are better than someone else, because Christmas is telling you that you could never get to heaven on your own. God had to come to you.*"

I like that, and Keller is absolutely right. The good news is really good when we realize we're not so good, and that's what I want to explore with you this morning.

I want to share another fishing story, this time from the Gospel of Luke, which is the third out of the four gospels. Luke was not one of the original disciples. He was not an apostle. He was a physician, thought to be Greek not Jewish, a very smart guy in his time, and he set out to carefully and accurately and thoroughly

investigate the story of Jesus. He wanted to know the story inside and out, and like Paul Harvey, he wanted to know the rest of the story as well. Luke left no stone unturned and he wrote it all down, so much so, that after he wrote his gospel and the book of Acts – by volume, by the sheer number of words, it is Luke who wrote most of the New Testament, not Paul as commonly thought. So, the story I am about to read is a thoroughly investigated story – a real story, with real people, in a real place, at a real time.

If you have your Bible, turn to **Luke 5**, and we will begin with **verse 1**. I am going to read the entire story to you.

¹Now 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; ²and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³And 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. ⁴When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷so 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. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰and 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." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

This story takes place along the banks of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus is teaching. People had gathered to hear Him speak – for He did not speak like the other teachers, and if you think about it, **how could anyone speak like Jesus?**

He's the Son of God, and Luke tells us the people were listening to the **word of God**. It wasn't being taught to them like I might teach you, for little did they know, they were hearing God, who took on a body of flesh, speak to them. Jesus was speaking; therefore, His words were the words of God.

Luke continues and says that Jesus noticed two boats, and He saw fishermen washing and mending their nets. Now, these nets were large drag nets that were used for fishing at night, and in the morning, they cleaned their nets, picked-out seaweed and other things, and let the nets dry in the sun. Then they would roll them up and put them back in the boat to be ready for the next night of fishing. It was time consuming work made more difficult and frustrating this time because they caught nothing the night before. Anyway, I think it fair to assume that while Jesus was teaching the crowd, Peter and Andrew, James and John, who were nearby taking care of their nets, were listening.

Well, there was a problem. As the crowds got larger and larger and pushed and pushed to get closer to Jesus, pretty soon Jesus was being pushed into the water. I guess Jesus didn't want to walk on water just yet – it wasn't the right time to do that, so He asked Peter to take Him out in the boat, just off shore, so He could have some space to continue to speak to the people. Both Jesus and Peter are in the boat, and we can assume that Peter is still listening to what Jesus is saying.

When Jesus finished speaking to the crowd, He tells Peter to take Him fishing. Jesus tells Peter to **“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”** Now, this was really inconvenient for Peter because he had already cleaned and dried his nets from last night's fishing, and secondly, fishing is done at night because fish come up during the evening to feed when the water is not so warm. They had been fishing all night, fishing when fishing is supposed to be good, and they caught absolutely nothing, and now Jesus, a carpenter, is telling this professional fisherman, a guy who has been fishing all of his life, a guy who knows the waters like the back of his hand, a charter member of Cabela's, to go fishing when you're not supposed to go fishing.

But Peter, who has been listening to Jesus teach for a while and obviously has some respect for Him because Jesus had previously healed his mother-in-law, agrees to row out father into deeper water to take Jesus fishing – **and guess what?** Sure enough, they start catching fish, a massive number of fish – so much fish that the nets start to break. It's so unbelievable, so unexpected, so crazy that Peter has to yell for his fishing partners James and John to bring out their boat to help – and as they haul the fish into their boats, their boat begins to sink because of the weight.

Now I want to stop here for a moment. Jesus told Peter to row out to the **deep water**. If you think about the ministry of Jesus with His disciples, they literally found themselves in deep water on a few occasions. I recall a time when Jesus

calmed a terrible storm while they were in deep water. I also remember when Jesus walked on top of deep water, and each time, these deep-water experiences revealed something about Jesus and they revealed something about the disciples. I think that's why the Lord takes us into deep water where we find ourselves way in over our heads, but He's trying to teach us something through these experiences, and that's what we see going on here, for in the middle of all this craziness, something happens – Peter falls down at the feet of Jesus and says,

“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Jesus knows how to meet people right where they are, and this experience with the fish went right to the core of this fisherman. Healing your mother-in-law is one thing, and no offense to mother-in-laws, but for Peter – this really hit home, for Jesus rules the fish of the sea, He knows where the fish are, and He has the power to bring them to the nets. I'm sure Peter had heard numerous fish stories over the years and probably told a few himself, but nothing like this had ever happened before to anyone on those waters. This wasn't just another fish story – this was as real as it gets for Peter, and in that moment, something happened where it was no longer about fish.

In that moment, Peter got a glimpse of who Jesus really was – and also in that moment, Peter came to a realization of who he truly was. In that deep-water experience with God in his boat, Peter sees himself in a way he has not seen himself before – it was too much to take in, and so Peter says to Jesus **“Go away from me Lord.”**

It wasn't that Peter was trying to get rid of Jesus – how could he, they are in a boat, but rather Peter was crushed with the realization of his own unworthiness, for to see Jesus as He really is, forced Peter and us to see ourselves as we really are – and we're not so good.

Peter is overwhelmed and says, **“I am a sinful man.”** Peter did not confess a particular sin – he did the right thing by taking Jesus fishing, but in the presence of God, he became aware of his own sinful nature. In contrast to Jesus, Peter became painfully aware of just how sinful he truly was in the deep water.

But Jesus said to Peter, **“do not fear.”** It's interesting that Jesus seems to ignore Peter's confession about his unworthiness and his sinfulness. Jesus knows the truth about Peter, in fact, He knows Peter better than Peter knows Peter, and Jesus could have told him your sinfulness is so bad that one day you will swear you never knew me, but Jesus did not do that because at this point in the deep water,

what mattered was what Peter knew about Peter. The truth was, his goodness wasn't so good, and that is true for everyone else.

The goodness of the good news comes from realizing we aren't so good, and the Apostle Paul speaks to this very truth in his letter to the Romans. In **Romans 3**, beginning with **verse 10**, Paul says,

¹⁰“There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; ¹²All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.”

There is no one, **not even one**, who is good. Now you might say, “*Hey Pastor, that’s not true for I know some good people.*” Well, let me explain it this way: our goodness is like a canoe. A canoe may work in a stream or a pond, but it’s useless in an ocean. Likewise, our goodness may work in this life, but it will not get us to the next. It will not get us to heaven. In other words, our goodness is not good enough when it comes to eternal life. From God’s point of view, according to His standards – not ours, there are none who are good, and if you are still fuzzy about this, Paul makes his point crystal clear in **verse 23**. He says,

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

All means all. We are all in the exact same boat. We all fall short and are unable to save ourselves, and that’s why Jesus came. Paul continues in **verse 24** and says,

“Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

By God’s grace, we are **justified**, declared righteous, made right with God only by the finished work of Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves for our goodness is not good enough. We could never get to heaven on our own, so God had to come to us, and that’s why the birth of Jesus was good news of great joy because God knows we all fall short, we all have been sentenced to death for our sin, but Jesus took that death penalty upon Himself – paid our sin debt in full, and out of His great love for us, offers to those who will accept it by faith, the free **gift** of eternal life – and it all begins, when just like Peter, we realize we’re not so good.

Evangelist Billy Graham passed away on February 21, 2018, and at his memorial service, his daughter Ruth shared this story about her father.

“After 21 years, my marriage ended in divorce. I was devastated. I floundered. My husband had betrayed me at the deepest levels. I understood I had Biblical grounds for divorce, but I did not want to be divorced. I did not want to hurt or displease God in any way.

My family thought it would be a good idea for me to move away from the Shenandoah Valley, to get a fresh start somewhere else. So, I decided to live in Florida near my older sister Gigi and her family and near a good church. The pastor of that church introduced me to a handsome widower, and we began to date fast and furiously. My children didn't like him, but I thought, They're almost grown. And they can't tell me what to do. I knew what was best for my life.

My mother called me from Seattle. My father called me from Tokyo. They said, “Honey, why don't you slow down? Let us get to know this man.”

They had never been a single parent. They had never been divorced. What did they know? So, being stubborn, willful and sinful, I married this man on New Year's Eve, and within 24 hours I knew I'd made a terrible mistake.

After five weeks, I fled. I was afraid of him. What was I going to do? I wanted to go talk to my mother and my father.

On my way to Montreat, I stopped and picked up my daughter Windsor from boarding school. I felt wrecked. I was coming home with my life in pieces. Shame weighed me down ... I dreaded having to meet my parents' gaze—I didn't think I could handle what their eyes might communicate. I wanted to run and hide. But I could not. I had nowhere else to go. I could not undo my mistake. I knew I had to face it. I felt unworthy to go home, but I needed my parents.

I look back now, overwhelmed by God's tenderness and timing, for it was at this, my darkest hour, that God stepped in with one of His most powerful metaphors in my life.

“My father was not God. But he showed me what God is like that day. I am so grateful God accepts me as I am—hurting, wounded, broken.”

It was a two-day drive to Montreat. Questions whirled in my mind. What was I going to say to Daddy? What was I going to say to Mother? What was I going to say to my children? I'd been such a failure. What were they going to say to me? “We're tired of fooling with you. We told you not to do it. You've embarrassed us.”

Many of you know that we live on the side of a mountain. And as I wound myself up the mountain, I rounded the last bend in my father's driveway, and my father was standing there waiting for me.

*My father, who had every reason to rebuke, wrapped his strong arms around me, pulled me into a warm embrace, and greeted me with these simple words:
"Welcome home."*

There was no shame. There was no blame. There was no condemnation. Just unconditional love.

My father's embrace at that moment was one of the most profound gestures of acceptance I have ever experienced. To be utterly broken and still accepted. To feel ugly and yet be loved. To feel like an outcast and still be welcomed. I marveled at the contrast between my heart, full of shame and regret, and my father's, so full of love.

I must have felt many things at once in his arms: shock, relief, gratitude, safety, disbelief. One thing I most definitely felt was shattered. And through his embrace, my father let me know I had permission to feel that way. He was not condemning me. No defense or explanation was required.

My father was not God. But he showed me what God is like that day. His one act of grace changed my life and informed who I am. I am so grateful God accepts me as I am—hurting, wounded, broken. I am glad He chooses me to be part of His family, regardless of my past mistakes and sins. He wants me. He cares about me. His arms are open to me at all times.

Even when I am in the ruins, God stands watching the road, eager for me to come to Him. God doesn't stop at ruin, it's where He begins. And brokenness is a qualification for service to Him.

God does not hold in His hand a list of my failures. He is not waiting to judge me. He is waiting to be with me. He is waiting to embrace me and welcome me home.

And that invitation is open for you."

The good news of God's love and forgiveness and acceptance is really good when we realize we're not so good. It's really good when we come to understand that we are broken and wrecked and sinful – desperate for a Savior, and that's what Christmas is all about for God sent us a Savior – His Son Jesus.

Source Material:

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