

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

First Followers

Luke 5.1-11

January 29, 2017

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; ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ 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." ⁶ When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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!" ⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

Last week we began a study of the "source documents" of the Christian faith... we hope to look at the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John from now through Easter.

And we're focused especially on the supporting cast of characters... because IN Jesus Christ's interactions with them, HE HIMSELF is revealed.

Today begins a kind of series WITHIN the series as we look at the theme of His training the Twelve or to put it another way: what does it mean to be enrolled in the school of Jesus Christ? How does He cultivate or develop and transform the people under His care? What happens when a person is approached by Jesus Christ and that person responds to Him? What next? What kind of people is He interested in and what response does He want from them?

Some people call what I am trying to describe, “discipleship”. And that’s the theme over the next few weeks – what is the process people undergo when they join themselves to Jesus Christ OR are called and enrolled by Him – what IS discipleship?

You’ll notice that there are four quotations in today’s passage and I’m going to use the four quotes (vv.4, 5, 8 and 10) as a framework for this teaching.

Each of these quotations contains something that’s recognizable TO and shared BY virtually every follower of Jesus Christ. Each quote expresses a component, a chapter, a stage or level in the practice of (what Francis Schaeffer called) “True Spirituality.”

Here are the four quotes/points: 1) “Launch out into the deep”, 2) “But I will”, 3) “ Go away from me” and 4) “Do not fear”

The first quote (v. 4) is Jesus Christ speaking to Simon Peter and saying, “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 comes to believe in Jesus Christ hears the calling and it sounds counterintuitive and even absurd.

For Peter, it would have been very unusual to take fishing advice from a carpenter! Fishing wasn’t a hobby for him – 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.

Now, Simon Peter had known Jesus Christ up to this point. The passage directly before this one took place in Simon Peter’s home where Jesus Christ healed Peter’s mother-in-law and there were apparently many other encounters when they HEARD Jesus say, “Come and See” (see Luke 4.38ff).

So, Simon Peter was a follower of Jesus Christ, 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!

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 have 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? I wasn’t raised that way!” 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 Home Group or a Class with real people). 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/landlubber 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 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 he 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.

It feels like you're twisting in the wind...feel like you are bucking the system or acting contrary to the evidence...to what you know (or thought you knew). But somehow...this Person...you find yourself saying, "He is real...He is true...is TRUSTWORTHY..."

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

Third, the story reaches its climax when after the miraculous haul of fish when 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! ('Tis the season...of Epiphany on the Liturgical Calendar!)

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.

And NOW, 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!"

In the same way, Simon Peter recognizes that THIS is a supernatural Being and that HE, Peter is IN way over his head...and that he is 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 am 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, that 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 who's 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."

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 gather 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 but also 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."

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 and into His mission.