

SERMON
02-09-2025
Luke 5:1-11

This passage from Luke offers us beautiful imagery. This story has captured the imagination of artists throughout many eras. I have included just one of these in your bulletins this morning. I hope you will take it home with you.

There is a lot going on in this story from this passage of Luke. There are many factual and mystical or spiritual elements. There are elements of Jesus' response to the crowd of people who have come to hear him, who are pressing up against him so closely that he seeks refuge in a boat offshore.

He doesn't abandon the crowd but speaks to them from a distance. Not too far away but probably far enough that they would have needed to stop the other aspects of their busy-ness and listened with intention. Perhaps that was the idea.

Jesus borrows the boat from Simon Peter.

Why does he choose Simon Peter's boat?

Was it the boat or the man that he was seeking? He asks Simon Peter to cast out his nets with faith that there will be a good catch. Simon Peter with reluctance, does so.

To Jesus, he says, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

There is disbelief in his voice, there is fatigue. But too there is a willingness to obey. What has he got to lose? And then there is the miraculous catch of many fish—too many and the nets are stretched beyond their capacity. Simon calls to his friends, and as they take in the huge number of fish, their boats threaten to sink.

Simon, in his fear, cries out to Jesus to leave them. Who is this man, Simon wonders? And then Simon is struck with an even larger fear. Perhaps this man is from God.

And if this is so, then Simon fears he may drown, not from the weight of the fish, but from the weight of his sin. In the face of God, Simon sees a reflection of his sins.

I suspect that in this moment, he saw himself for what he thought he was worth. And it gave him great pain.

This face-to-face encounter with Jesus brought forth a brutal moment of self-realization for him. A moment where he realized the chasm between what his life had become and who he knew he wanted to be.

In this encounter, he realizes that his nets have been empty – in so many ways. But in the presence of this man, Jesus, his nets are full. What Jesus has to offer at first frightens Simon. This moment of realization threatens to drown him. With Jesus comes so many fish.

And then Jesus laughs-I imagine. There is a bit of a Be Careful What You Pray For aspect to the story here. Jesus is saying, Yes, Simon, today we have fish. Lots of fish. But you will not drown. For tomorrow, we will fish for people.

James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon, are amazed and join with Jesus too. They bring their boats to shore.

Perhaps it was never about the boat. Or about needing a boat to go offshore. Perhaps it was always about the men in the boats.

There really are many elements of this story that call out to us. There is Ministry: to the crowd, from the boat, Jesus preaches and teaches. the message of the Good News.

There is Miracle: Where there were no fish, Jesus filled the nets to overflowing.

There is Redemption and reconciliation. Where Simon felt only sin and unworthiness, he is healed and reconciled with God.

And lastly, there is discipleship. From this time forward those who have chosen a deep spiritual connection with Jesus will carry forth his ministry. Their lives will be forever changed in this moment.

With regard to the painting that I included in the bulletin today, there are several questions that come to mind. As I had many artistic renditions to choose from, how is it that I chose this one? How is it that I heard the gospel story in this way? Such that my thoughts drew me to these colors and faces, the fish, and the feel of the painting. What was the message that spoke to me in the scriptures that I found retold in this painting?

With those questions in mind, I hope that you will trust me to read this passage once more. I invite you to listen with your ears and your soul. Where is God in this story for you today? What is the message that God wants you to hear today?

We'll take a moment of silence after I read this to let your thoughts settle.

The Gospel Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Amen