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Following the Call
Luke 5:1-11

*Once while Jesus^[a] was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee), and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.³ 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.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, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.**”⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.⁷ 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.⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, **he fell down** at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;¹⁰ 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.**”¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

Follow Me.

That’s our call—but what does it *mean to follow Jesus*?

Jesus comes to the Sea of Galilee that day *to teach*—he gets out in the boat, presumably to be in the front of the crowd, and probably to allow his voice to carry better over the water. But notice what he does.

He sits in the boat.

That’s what Rabbis did at that time, they stood to read scripture, but sat down to teach, as a sign of authority.

So, Jesus sits in the boat and preaches. And we have *no idea what* he spoke about that day, because that’s not the point of this story.

Instead, after preaching,
he tells Simon Peter to put out the fishing nets into the deep water.

Think about that.

Jesus is in their territory, *he's come to their 'office'* so to speak,
in their boats,
and now Jesus presumes to tell these *professional fishermen* how to fish—
after they've been fishing all night without a catch!

This is typical Jesus.

He doesn't stay in the synagogue—
(which is a lesson for us as Christians today—
we cannot stay within the walls of the church).
He went out to meet people where they lived and worked.
He engaged people in their ordinary lives, just like on this day at the Sea.

And Jesus finds people in their time of *need*.

Simon Peter is not sick, but he's sure tired and frustrated,
having been out all night without catching any fish!
So here's Jesus, coming to help.

Even if Simon was likely perturbed at his suggestion
that they just put out the nets again, and suddenly that would change their luck!

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they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.*

Incredibly, by listening to the advice of an itinerant preacher,
they make a *miraculous catch of fish!*
So much, that they had to call the other boat to help,
And it still threatened to sink them!

But this miracle is *not the end of the story*.

It's just the *beginning*.

And, it's *not even the REAL MIRACLE!*

It's just the context for what is about to happen!

The *real miracle is the CALL.*

The call of Simon Peter and the others, to follow Jesus.

After this great catch, Simon is *humbled* before Jesus. He's heard of him, he knew he was a great teacher, but now he knows he's far more than just a teacher.

This is the Lord.

But when Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken....

Simon, much like Isaiah and Moses and Jeremiah before him, feels *unworthy* of being in the presence of God.

So what Jesus says next is *key* to the call.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "***Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.***"¹¹ *When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

Do not be afraid.

Those are some of the most important words in all of the Bible.

Do not be afraid.

From now on you will be catching people.

That's when they left everything (think about that—they abandon that huge catch of fish!), These men left it all, and followed Jesus, right then and there.

In Matthew and Mark Jesus says—

I will make you fish for people, with the Greek word for fishing.

Here Jesus uses a different Greek word, *zogreo*, which means ***to catch or rescue.***

Just as these fishermen have literally ***been rescued*** by Jesus for a completely new and amazing life as disciples, Jesus says that ***they too will go out and do this for others!*** They will be in the business of rescuing people. And there is no boundary on which people or where. It's just a call to rescue people.

And we know from all of Jesus' ministry, that this means ***especially those*** who are marginalized, left behind, and excluded.

It means Jew AND Gentile, the poor, the sick, the sinners, the prostitutes, the lepers and the unclean.

Jesus means *everyone*.

So there's a lot in this story.

What does it *have to do with US today?*

Some would say it's just about *evangelism*—reaching out to people who don't know Jesus, trying to 'catch' them and bring them into the church.

But what if there is so *much more?*

In this story, we learn how important it is to *LISTEN to Jesus*.

All too often we are listening to other people, pundits, and social media for direction in life.

This story reminds us that we need to listen to Jesus, first and foremost.

Even when *we think he can't possibly understand* our work, Or our situation, or our lives.

He wasn't a fisherman, but he sure knew about the power of God, and it was displayed in that miraculous catch!

How do YOU listen to Jesus?

How do you turn away from the noisy voices in this world, and hear what God is saying to you?

We also learn about *TRUST*.

It wasn't easy for Simon to trust Jesus—what did this carpenter teacher know about catching fish?

But something in him knew he should trust.

And after seeing all those fish—

he knew this was *THE person* to trust with his life.

It's why he was able to leave everything behind and follow!

How do YOU trust Jesus?

How do you let go of your skepticism and doubts?

Or your fear, and just trust?

In this story, we learn about *OBEDIENCE*.

Simon may have doubted Jesus' word on catching fish, but he did put those nets into the deep water.

He may have had his worries about abandoning his way of life, but he did leave everything to follow Jesus.

What about US?

Are we able to ***listen, trust, and then obey*** what Jesus asks us to do?

Are you willing to do is being asked of you?

Are we paying attention to what Jesus is asking?

And then there's the lesson about ***EXPECTATIONS***.

Notice what Simon says to Jesus,

after telling him how they've been fishing all night without a catch.

Simon says—***Yet, if you say so***—I'll put these nets into the deep water.

If you say so, and that's when they caught so many fish they almost sank!

Simon's expectations were ***way too low—what about OURS?***

Are we expecting God to show up, in our everyday lives?

Do we expect God to help us? And do great things?

Do we expect God to lead this church, and guide us into an amazing future?

If not, why not?

Jesus is the God of abundance! And amazing gifts!

The God of ***new life and new opportunities!***

We should expect God to do great things—today—right before our very eyes!

The poet ***Annie Dillard*** used to say that

when we come to worship, we are like children playing with chemistry sets,

we really should be wearing ***crash helmets***,

ushers should issue ***life-preservers***, we need ***belts*** in our pews,

all because God is going to show up!

And there's even more to this story.

We learn about ***DEEP WATER, or LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONE***.

Jesus didn't tell Simon to just try a little harder.

He told him to ***Put the nets into the deep water***.

In other words, leave the shore, and the shallow water—

where you can see if there are fish.

And go into the ***deep water***.

The fish are going to be in big schools only in deep water.

But deep water—is where you can't see the bottom,
 You can't see if there are any fish,
 you can't see much of anything.

What is that deep water for US, today?

Where are you being asked by God, to step outside your comfort zone?
 To leave what's familiar, and move in a new direction?
 Where are you being asked to go, and all you have is trust?

I wonder if one place ***we're all being asked to step into*** the deep water,
 is the place of ***welcome, unity, and understanding***.
 Especially given our divided world today.

Today is the first Sunday of ***Black History Month***,
 and we will be celebrating by profiling just a few of our prominent black church
 members and community members in modern times.
 But of course, there are countless black role models and stories for us to learn.
 We all know of famous leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. in the civil rights
 movement, or Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the fight against apartheid.
 But I am constantly amazed by other black leaders
 that history has not profiled until recently.

Did any of you see the movie ***Hidden Figures?***

It's the story of the black female mathematicians who played a vital role at NASA
 during the early years of our space program!
 Black women, working alongside almost all white men,
 and working in crazy conditions,
 like not having a bathroom they were allowed to use in the same building!
 Just another story for us to be inspired by!

I was reading an article this week entitled:

"Is Black History Month Still Relevant?" <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/stories/is-black-history-month-still-relevant/>.

Black History month began in 1926 with Negro History Week,
 and in 1976 President Gerald Ford made Black History month a national
 observance in America.

Some have argued after the election of Barack Obama as President,
 that we no longer need something like Black History month.

But the truth is, we need it ***more than ever before***.

And the church needs it more than ever before.

Race relations are worse, not better.

Hatred, prejudice, and white supremacy is on the rise, not falling.
 Even within the Christian community.
 It has been stoked by politicians,
 who use white fear and prejudice as a rallying cry.
 The death of George Floyd ignited a call for racial justice,
 But it also deepened a division and a call to hatred.

And it's grown into something ***far beyond prejudice in people's hearts.***

Books about race or by black authors are being banned,
 In one state readings by Martin Luther King, Jr. have even been taken off required
 reading lists for public school students!

Robert P. Jones, White Too Long blog, January 14, 2022.

In one place, textbooks have even tried to change the history of slavery—
 by not saying that we brought, bought and enslaved blacks for hundreds of years,
 but rather that some blacks emigrated on their own from Africa to work on
 plantations and make a better life in America.

Can you even imagine such a ***false statement?***

It's kind of like denying the Holocaust, which sadly, is also happening today.

So, we need Black History Month, because black history is all of our history,
 in our church and our community!

We need to celebrate diversity, and welcome, and acceptance
 and love of our neighbors, especially in a time of such hate and division.

Because we are all children of God.

And if we are to rescue people like Jesus calls us to do,
 if we are to reach out with the love and good news of Jesus Christ,
 that means we have to ***get beyond our own prejudice,*** (which sadly we ALL have,
 to some degree or another).

It means seeing all people ***as BELOVED children of God.***

Made in the IMAGE of God.

And here's the thing---we can learn so much from our brothers and sisters of a
 different color, a different background, or a different viewpoint!

In the fall of this year we will hopefully enjoy a belated celebration with a black
 community member speaking to us while we enjoy Ms. Hank's incredible food!

So, what does it mean to follow the call of Jesus?

It means we *Listen*.

We *trust*.

We *obey*.

We *expect Great Things*.

And we go out into the *deep water*—

well past our comfort zone,

while we work to rescue people, just as we have been rescued by God.

This is what it means to follow Jesus today.

This is the *Good News* of the Gospel.

And for this good news, all God's people can say together, Amen.