

## Windows on The Word: Leaving Your Nets

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

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Luke 5:1-11

Today's window is the center bay on the west side of church. You've heard that the theme of our service is how God calls his people, notice that calling is the theme of that whole bay. In the corner nearest to me at the bottom you have the calling of Matthew. On the other side at the bottom is the calling of Nathanael. He was the one Jesus saw under the fig tree before he called him. Our passage is the biggest part of the window. It's Jesus calling Peter - he's the bearded one. I think the other one in the boat with him is meant to be John. In western art John is portrayed as a young, clean-shaven man. Peter on the other hand is portrayed as bearded and burly...sort of like me. Jesus is standing on the shore. He's already told them to let down their nets and now they're pulling them up. The nets are full of more fish than they have ever seen and they are looking at Jesus with astonishment.

I think the key to understanding this passage is in verse 8. *What is Peter afraid of?* Why does Peter react the way he does? Jesus does this wonderful miracle, a miracle of abundance, but after he sees it, Peter falls on his knees and says "Go away from me Lord." Leave me alone Jesus. Jesus... please... just let me be. That's a really interesting reaction, especially when you consider that everyone else is having exactly the opposite reaction to Jesus. Everyone else is moving *towards* Jesus. In verse one there are so many people around him, he has to get into a boat to preach. Everyone else wants to keep Jesus as close as possible. But Peter says, 'Go away!' Why does he do that? Answer that question and you will get to the heart of the passage.

The story starts innocently enough. Jesus is standing by the Sea of Galilee preaching the Kingdom of God. To make sure that the crowds don't mob him, he steps into Simon's boat and preaches from there. Simon Peter and his colleagues sit at the water's edge washing their nets. They're only half listening to the sermon because they're tired. They've just finished a long, unproductive night fishing. But when the sermon is done, out of the blue, Jesus says to the weary fisherman "*Put out in deep water and let down the nets for a catch.*"

Now...how do you think Peter felt about this request? Peter has just pulled an all-nighter, an unproductive all-nighter. He's finally finished cleaning his nets, he's put them away, and he wants to go home to bed. Jesus chooses that moment to tell Peter to go out again. Simon Peter is not warm to Jesus' request. "Excuse me sir, but you want me to go fishing again!?! No disrespect, but aren't you a carpenter? Well, let me remind you, Mr. Carpenter, we've just been out all night fishing and haven't caught anything, we worked all the best fishing spots, and there were no fish. I've been doing this my whole life, and I promise you, if the fish weren't there last night, they certainly aren't going to be there this morning."

Jesus' request seems even more unreasonable when you know a little bit about fishing techniques. Simon and his colleagues were almost certainly fishing with a net called a 'trammel net'. This was a net made of linen. It was large and heavy, it required 2-4 people to deploy, it needed washing every morning, *and* most importantly, it was visible to fish during the day. It wasn't made of thin invisible fabric. It was made of thick linen. This net required the darkness of night to be effective. Jesus' asking them to go out during the day to fish with this net made about as much sense as trying to catch a fish with no bait on your hook.

And yet, even though he's tired and thinks the request is crazy, Peter does what Jesus asks. Probably out of respect for Jesus. Peter probably feels like he owes Jesus. After all Jesus had just healed Peter's mother in law - you read about that in 4:39. And when someone heals your mother-in-law, the least you can do is take him fishing. So, with a sigh and an eye-roll, Simon and his partners throw their nets over the side of the boat. The nets sink to the floor of the Galilean Sea. The fishermen wait a bit, and then, without any expectation at all, they start to haul the nets back up. But they can't, because the nets are bursting with fish. They call their partner boat over. They fill both boats and there are so many fish that both boats almost sink. The fishermen limp back to shore and once they are back on land, an ashen-faced Peter staggers over to Jesus, falls at his feet and says, "*Go away Jesus. Please just leave me alone. I am a sinful man.*"

Most of you know this story so you are not surprised by Peter's reaction. But just for a moment try to see this story through fresh eyes, because if you do you will realize that Peter's reaction is exactly the opposite of what you would expect in this situation. Think about it. Jesus has just given him unheard of business success. Jesus has just given Peter's business the most profitable day in its history! With Jesus' help his

business has reached new production highs. Why would you tell Jesus to leave!? Wouldn't you say to him, Jesus please stay! "Wow Jesus that was amazing! Why don't you come back tomorrow so we can do it again! I have a proposition for you!! Let's you and I become partners. We could revolutionize the fishing industry. We would dominate!!" Wouldn't you think Peter would want to keep this power close at hand? Up to now that is exactly how people have been reacting to Jesus and his miracles. Right before our passage, in Chapter 4:42, Jesus does a series of miracles in Capernaum, but then early in the morning he leaves town because he's called to preach in other places. But the people of Capernaum come after him. 4:42 - "The people were looking for him and when they came to the place where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them." Again, it's exactly the opposite reaction. The villagers say, 'Please don't leave.' Peter says, 'Please, please, please leave me alone.' Why does Peter do that?

Peter asks Jesus to leave because Peter is beginning to see that there is more to Jesus than he first thought. He's beginning to see that Jesus isn't an ordinary man, there is something special about him. Peter realizes that Jesus is not safe. Peter realizes that Jesus isn't here to help him catch fish; Jesus is here to change his life. And Peter doesn't want his life changed. Peter already has plans for his life. He's married. He's got a good business going. He and his wife are planning a future. Kids. Maybe a nice little house by the sea. Peter likes this plan. He's comfortable with it. But all of a sudden Jesus comes close to him. Too close. He can feel the weight of his glory. And all of a sudden this dreams seems small and selfish. He can feel the weight of Jesus' call pressing on him. And he is scared.

Read the gospels and you see that people approach Jesus in two different ways. First there are the crowds. The crowds see Jesus as a man who can help them with their problems. They have disabilities and debts. Their problems are making them unhappy and keep them from fulfilling their dreams. They come to Jesus because they hear he can fix things. He's the miracle guy. So they come to him and say, "Jesus please help me!" The crowds are not really looking to follow Jesus; they just want to get rid of their problems. Last week they tried acupuncture. This week they try Jesus. Jesus loves these people. He is kind to these people. Jesus has compassion on them. He heals them, and the crowds go back to their old life. It's business as usual.

But standing out from the crowd are those who come to Jesus and say, "Jesus I want to follow you. I don't just want you to fix my problem; I want to be like you!" Sometimes they don't come to Jesus. Sometimes – like in our story - Jesus comes to them and says, "I choose you to be my follower; I am going to put my life in you." These are disciples. Jesus talks differently to disciples. Jesus smiles at the crowds, heals them, and they bounce off healed and happy. But Jesus says hard things to the disciples. Jesus gives the disciples a cross. He tells them, if you follow me you will feel like a homeless person. Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head. They ask to follow him and he tells them they're not allowed to say goodbye to their family. They want to follow him and he tells them to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. They want to follow him and he says, you will be persecuted, you will be last and you will be a servant of all.

Ultimately Jesus doesn't come to us to make us happy and make our dreams come true. Jesus comes to make us disciples. He comes to change our hearts, to transform us. He's not going to give your life a new coat of paint; he's going to strip it down to the studs and do a total rebuild. 'You must be born again,' says Jesus. New birth is no picnic. Just ask a mom. Peter is right to be scared.

When I hear Peter tell Jesus to go away, I think of Thomas Nagel. Thomas Nagel is a philosopher of mind. Nagel taught at New York University. He's an atheist, but he's an interesting atheist. In one of his books Nagel admits that part of the reason he's an atheist is that he doesn't want there to be a God. It's not simply a lack of evidence that makes him an unbeliever; he doesn't want God to exist. He says the idea that God might exist makes him afraid (maybe a little like Peter in this story). "I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God...it's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." Why doesn't he want the universe to be like that? Because he wants to be his own person. He wants to be the boss. He wants to be lord of his life and do whatever his heart desires. he doesn't want there to be a God who demands things from him, who calls him to change, who might judge him, who might tell him 'no.'

At least he's honest about it. I suspect that's true of a lot of atheists and unbelievers. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis, who was an unbeliever himself, describes the mindset this way. "In each of us [there is] something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, [something that wants] to take

advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe. And especially it wants to be left to itself: to keep well away from anything that might make it feel small.” That’s Thomas Nagel. ‘I don’t want there to be a God, because I don’t want to submit to anything. I don’t want anyone telling me what to do, or who I can or can’t be.’ That’s also Peter. That’s why Peter says, ‘Jesus please go away, because I know you are going to demand my life, my soul, my all and I don’t want to give it.’

Of course it’s too late for Peter. Jesus has called him. At the same time his mouth is telling Jesus to go away, the Holy Spirit is taking hold of his heart, and by the time the day is done he will leave his nets behind and he will become a fisher of people.

Even as I say these words, even as I proclaim Jesus to you, I know there’s part of you and definitely part of me that says, ‘This doesn’t sound like good news! I’m with Peter. I don’t want my life turned upside down. I like my creature comforts. I like stability. If drawing near to Jesus means change and challenge, I don’t want too get to close to him either. Can I just follow him at a safe distance?’ But when we feel that way we are selling ourselves short. You are made for more than that. We are meant to be more glorious and more alive than you can even imagine. We are created to have the life of the Holy Trinity in us. We are made for fellowship with the eternal God. Through Jesus, you are meant to participate in the eternal joy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You are made to do so much more than survive, you are made for eternal wonder. In his famous sermon the Weight of Glory, C.S. Lewis puts it this way “It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Whether we like it or not, this text asks us a question – it presses us: “*Are you a disciple? Or are you part of the crowd?*” At Christmas, Jesus came down into the mud for us. He came to that slum where we were making our mud pies. But he didn’t come here to leave us in that slum; he came to raise us to the heights of infinite joy. And that journey from the slum to the infinite joy is the hardest and the most wonderful trip you will ever take. He wants to teach you his compassion, and so he will need to break the selfishness of your heart, and that will hurt. He wants to fill you with his love, but when you grow in his love, you will find your own heart wounded by the pains of others. The more you grow in love, the more you will grieve. Jesus will fill you with his justice and his righteousness, but as that happens you will become more aware of the injustices of the world, you will become spiritually sensitive to places of darkness and you will want to do something about those places. You will see your fellow humans struggling with lives that are lonely and empty, you will see them in the slum with the mud pies, and you will want something better for them. You will become a fisher of people.

Having Jesus turn you into his disciple? It will be the hardest thing you will ever do. It will be the best thing you ever do.

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