



Decisions Along the Way

TEXT
Luke 5:1–11

March 3, 2019 — Sermon by Rev. Zach Walker

Picture the scene. This itinerant rabbi has been preaching and interpreting Scripture in ways no one has heard. He has already healed people — sometimes scandalously even on the Sabbath — and word quickly spreads about this man from Galilee. People seek him out; they want to hear what it is he has to say.

It has, in Luke’s account, happened rather quickly. So much so that when we find Jesus here in Luke’s fifth chapter, he hasn’t even called any of the 12 apostles yet, and is already so popular that crowds are following him — pressing in on him.

On this particular day, Jesus is walking and teaching, and he sees up there ahead of him, near the shore, a couple of boats that have just come in from fishing — and the fishermen are washing their nets.

In this moment, what Jesus sees is opportunity — something that could be used for his purposes, something that would benefit the crowds that were following him, and that would also make others partners in his ministry.

He gets into one of the boats and asks Simon to put out a little from shore so he can preach to the crowds from out in the water.

But in order for that to happen, Simon is going to have to make a decision, expend effort, and ultimately decide that Jesus can use what Simon has. I don’t imagine, after having already been out on the water, Simon thought that what Jesus was asking was terribly convenient.

I think Jesus does this a lot. Jesus finds us in the midst of our lives and casually says to each of us, “I can use that for the sake of God’s kingdom.” And right away we see how Jesus is not just coming to Simon, but to each and every one of us, because Jesus needs to use something that you have.

Maybe you can readily identify what it is Jesus is asking of you to use. And if you can’t think of something, it might mean you need to do some soul searching, or even offer a prayer to God saying that you are willing.

Maybe it is using some of your time — or some resource that you have access to but that you have been hesitant to use. Maybe it is putting some talent of yours to use in service of the church or with an organization. Or maybe it is simply that you are being asked to slow down so you will notice someone in need at school or at work, and God is asking that once you notice that

person, you would take the small step of having a conversation or reaching out.

Jesus needs to use something that you have, and it is our decision how to respond.

So Simon takes Jesus out into the water, and when Jesus is done teaching, does he turn to Simon and say, “OK, thanks for the boat. Let’s head back to shore”?

Nope. Jesus says, “Hey, let’s go fishing.”

Something I love about this text is that it gives us Simon’s response: “With all due respect, we are the fisherman, and you are a rabbi. We’ve been out all night and haven’t caught anything. We were in the middle of cleaning our nets.”

And right here, I wonder if the author left out a sigh right here. Because in my head, there’s a big sigh. “We were *just* out there, and we didn’t catch anything, and what do you even know about fishing? [*Big sigh.*] OK, let’s go.”

Has someone ever asked you to do something and either in your head or maybe even right out of your mouth is, “Listen, you have no idea how busy I am. If you knew how busy I am, you would understand why I’m going to say no. If only you understood how shy I am. If only you knew

what I've been through. If you knew how broken I am, or how I'm afraid to do that. You don't know my life, so you don't know what you are asking."

What we tell other people all the time is that we know our own lives best; no one knows my life better than I do. And because no one knows my life, they just don't understand.

And do you know that is probably true? It's true with just one exception. God knows your life better than you do.

And so there will be a time that God calls to you, and your knee-jerk reaction will be to say to God, "If only you knew my life like I do." And God will say, "I do! I know your life better than you do. And I'm still asking you."

And if only in that moment we might pause like Simon did. If only in that moment we might trust that God truly does know us better than we can even know ourselves, and if we were to lead our lives in light of this truth and that trust.

Not only does Jesus need something that you have, but Jesus knows our lives better than we know our own lives, and if we can trust that, then just like Simon, we will be willing to head into deep waters with him.

And so Simon takes his boat out into the deep and drops his nets and brings in such a haul of fish that their nets begin to break, and they have to call out for help.

At this point we have to call out a reality. There are people who will tell you that if you just had Jesus in your life, everything

will be better. That sounds nice, doesn't it? I wish it were true.

Author Donald Miller writes, "To be sure, I like Jesus, and I still follow him, but the idea that Jesus will make everything better is a lie. . . . The truth is, the apostles never really promise Jesus is going to make everything better here on earth. Can you imagine an infomercial with Paul, testifying to the amazing product of Jesus, saying that he once had power and authority, and since he tried Jesus he's been moved from prison to prison, beaten, and routinely bitten by snakes? I don't think many people would be buying that product."¹

What I notice about this part of the story is that Jesus is *in the boat*, and their net is about to break, and it isn't Jesus that steps in. It's the other boat. In fact, you could argue that Jesus *causes* this situation, and he doesn't make an unbreakable net, or even offer a suggestion on what they should do. Simon summons the other boat to come to his aid.

Here's where this story gets really cool.

This story of the abundant catch, so abundant that help is required, is set within a story of a large crowd — a large catch in "fisher-of-people" terminology — pressing in on Jesus, and ends with his invitation to those who would be his first helpers. Do you see how cool that is?

It is not only in scarcity that we are in need of caring people to help us — even Jesus in this story incited others to be alongside him on the journey.

Don't get me wrong. Jesus should be a part of your life. I

am convinced of that. But Jesus alone is not enough; we need others. There will be times when it feels like your nets are about to break or your boat is about to sink — either from abundance or from wear and tear — and in both cases, we need people by our side to help us carry the load.

The heading of this section is not "Simon Catches a Lot of Fish With Jesus' Help" or "The Miraculous Catch," but instead "Jesus Calls the First Disciples." In the end, this is the story of how Simon (who is later to be called Peter) and the brothers James and John come to follow Jesus.

And it is only *after* these things happen that they follow him.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Wait a minute. The gospel of Matthew is quite different than Luke's version of events. In Matthew, Jesus just calls them and they go. In Matthew, he sees people, tells them to follow him, and they drop their nets and go."

In Matthew, we read, "As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there he saw two other brothers, James and John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets and he called to them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Jesus."

Now, aside from what the father Zebedee thought of all

this, Matthew's version portrays a scene where four people, with nothing more than an invitation, radically altering their lives.

Maybe you identify with that. At just the invitation, you are willing to drop what you know and follow. That's laudable. I could only hope I would do the same if I were in that situation. But I know myself too well, and I usually don't work that way. Perhaps that's why Luke's narrative speaks to me.

In Luke, it is only after this series of events — using a boat, fishing together, the coming together of community — it is only after all of these things that James, John and Simon-who-will-be-called-Peter left the life they knew.

I wonder sometimes if we trade too heavily on the name of Jesus when trying to talk to others about our faith, as though people will all immediately be on our side when we give our explanation: "Because Jesus." Maybe we would do better to invite people to join us for small parts of the journey. In my experience, I am willing to go along with a small ask. And if that works out, maybe I go a little further. And then maybe I experience something difficult and find a community to support me. Maybe all of those things need to happen before I can say to Jesus, "OK, let's see where this really goes."

Luke's version presents us with the idea that if Jesus were to call them right away, without inviting steps of trust first, maybe they wouldn't have said yes. Maybe they wouldn't have been able to see the possibility

of their lives changing in ways that are good for them and good for the world.

In both Matthew and Luke, these first apostles were willing — and in both, they were not perfect people. But only in Luke do we see trust being built rather than assumed.

So, in just a few days, it is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent, the season when we spend time, in the church calendar, to prepare for Easter. It's a good time to ask ourselves where we are in our faith lives. It's a good time to commit something we have to God's purposes, to stop offering reasons to God of why we *can't* and to instead entertain the possibility that we *can*, and to lean into those around us.

As mentioned earlier, and as many of you already knew, Pastor Len has accepted a call to serve First Presbyterian Church of Columbia, Tennessee. Len has been with us since June of 2015 and has been one of the caringest, most genuine, loving, and break-into-song-y-est people I have known. The people of Columbia, Tennessee, have called a true gift of a pastor into their midst.

Len led our staff devotional this past Monday and expressed his sadness about leaving this Village family, while also expressing joy and excitement about what God is calling him to.

There's something in particular Len said that will stick with me for a long time. He said we rarely feel prepared for what God calls us to next.

So often we have the idea that there are those who have no

hesitation responding to God's call.

But maybe just like the apostles, or like so many of the prophets, or like Len Carrell — maybe their response to God's call is not something done without so much as a raised eyebrow so much as it is done with a healthy helping of trust built up over a series of decisions in one's lifetime.

That opportunity is there for each of us. What do you have that Jesus can use? What does God know about your own life better than you do? Who is the community around you that helps you carry the load in times of trouble and times of abundance?

How are you trusting in Christ as we head into this Lenten season? And how will you and those around you be changed because of your trust in the God who is faithful?

OK, Jesus, let's see where this goes.

¹Miller, Donald. *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*. Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville (2009), pp. 203–204.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermon-sermon-archives.html>.