

Luke 5:1-11

5:1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,

5:2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.

5:3 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.

5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

5:6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst.

5:7 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.

5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

5:9 For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken,

5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who are partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

5:11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Sermon: Gone Fishin'

King Herod or Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, was Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and the client king of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Herod knew folks were bad off, and he knew they were desperate for work, too. And he also knew that all those folks in the Galilee were sitting on a gold mine with all those fine fish in a lake big enough to be called a sea. Of course, the fishermen of the Galilee were like sharecroppers – they didn't have the means to fish to scale, nor to market to the masses. But Herod did, and he told the peasants, "Go and get me my fish!!! I promise it'll be worth your while!!!"

Every morning, they rose early, set out in their boats, and labored with their nets. Each day, they hoped for a haul, a catch so big it would change their stars. Each evening, they had full nets alright. It's just that the nets weren't full of fish. They were full of empty promises, and broken dreams, and the other discards reserved for the peasant lifestyle. But one day boys and girls, we're gonna catch a whole lot of fish, and all those fish are gonna solve a whole lot of our problems.

Now imagine one day, a stranger comes to town. And he says, "Friends, just do me a favor, cast out your nets one more time. This time in deep water."

Reluctantly, you oblige. You've fished all night, just like every night for the last few years. There's not one inch of this lake you haven't explored. But okay, here goes.

Whoa! You pull the nets back up, and there's snappers, groupers, white fish, and fish you didn't even know existed. And you start shaking your net, and they're up to your ankles, and then to your knees, and then to your chest. And you ask your neighbor if he'll help you out. And in a minute or two, they're up to his chest, too. And there are SO many fish, your boats begin to sink. And the catch, THE CATCH, that thing you've longed for, and labored for, it's too big. It's SO big, it swallows you.

The stranger offers his hand. "Come with me," he says. "Step onto dry land. And start fishing for people instead."

We want this to be a story about fishing. God needs good anglers. And Jesus wants a boatload of people for this new community experiment.

But this isn't a story about fishing. It's a story of pursuit. Actually, it's a story about what we should pursue. We live on dry land. And if there are salmon swimming up the Neuse River, at least the portion that runs near us, I'm gonna let you try them first!

The fish we pursue are just things – they could just as well be sales leads, or gold, or bitcoin, or votes, or any other commodity. The fish represent the manufactured happiness we pursue. They represent the things we think we need to acquire to have value and purpose, to be successful in Herod's world.

Jesus' little demonstration shows his new friends (and us as well) that this hoarding of stuff – fish for the disciples, or whatever more modern

commodity you want to substitute for yourself – chokes and swallows the life out of them (and us, too). Who wants to drown in things?

Jesus invites them (and us!) to pursue relationships with neighbors.

Keep reading Luke's Gospel. Who needs two ten-ton boats full of fish, when two cans of sardines and five packs of saltines will feed the masses? Who needs a bag of Herod's gold, when your cloak, and your sandals, and the kindness of strangers will bring you shelter, and hospitality, and new friendship? Who needs a glamorous banquet, complete with one of those Brazilian steakhouse 'stop n' go' cards, when a loaf of bread and a simple cup will fill you up? Who needs the fine wines, and the fancy robes, and the marble palaces, when in the company of neighbors, God's kin-dom is made manifest?

Herod's world wants us to spin our wheels pursuing lifeless resources. Herod wants us to plunge our nets into the same old shallow waters. And as we pull up our net, we can feel the resistance. The tugging, the pulling, the straining, all of it jerking away our energy. And the payoff of this consumption is lifelessness. It distracts us from community. And it distracts us from God.

Jesus urges us to stop seeking to swim, or tug, or pull against the current; to stop seeking to build, and move, and contain so many resources. Instead, Jesus implores us to start sharing our most authentic resources: our time, our lives, our love, our hearts, our spirits with others. Because these things aren't baits or traps. They do not jerk people back into step; they do not dominate, or coerce, or require submission; they invite people into something authentic and whole.

And when we catch a glimpse of that gentle, common current, just like Simon Peter, and James, and John, we, too, find ourselves leaving the lure of Herod's everything for the promise and fulfillment of God's enough.

I want to go back to all those fish for a moment. It's such a powerful image. When we condition ourselves to live in a zero-sum gain world – more of something for you means less of something for me – we perpetuate a myth that our earth lacks abundant resources. We miss the forest of distribution for the tree of the big catch.

But think as well about this catch. It's so similar to the manna and quail in the wilderness. Ten tons of fresh fish, or fresh bread, or fresh Cornish hens is only valuable if it can be used by the community in the present. It can feed us today, but it'll spoil tomorrow. We can't hoard it away. And if it is gonna realize its value, it's gonna have to be distributed in a way where it can be accessed: an affordable market, a common table, neighborly acts of generosity. The world's resources, those ones created by the God we read about in Genesis, are optimized in community.

We also needn't dismiss the idea of deep water. Our pursuit of calling, of community, of discipleship can often be shallow. I don't mean to say it's lazy. I mean to say that Herod's world can overwhelm our senses, limit the ideas and possibilities we pursue. We become so fatigued by the idea of scarcity or inevitability that we reduce the perimeter of where we cast our nets.

And I think about Old Simon Peter. He was open to hearing a new idea. He walked away from the biggest catch of his life and traded it for the deep pursuit of God and neighbor. But he was slightly hesitant at first – “Stay away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Rubbish, Simon Peter! Rubbish!

In whose world are you sinful? Are you sinful because you don't meet Herod's exacting standards, don't check the boxes of his elitism? Don't comply with his enforced marginalization of all who threaten his authoritarianism? Yes, you are bruised and battered, a little rough around the edges, sharpened by life's harsh experiences. Nonetheless, you are a child of God, with every potential, buoyed by grace, held in the hands of a loving Creator, who longs to unlock your purpose and potential. You should know by now, Simon Peter, that God doesn't avoid "sinful men." Jesus welcomes everyone to community.

And I think this morning, about the first Acts Church. And I know, we've still got half a year before we get to Pentecost, but isn't that really the big catch?

Juxtapose the two scenes. Skilled fishermen, big strong men, overwhelmed by fish that flood their boats faster than water, and brought to that point because of the empire's insatiable desire for consumption. And in a few years, a church of faithful believers, whose numbers grow daily, praising God in the temple, and breaking bread with glad and generous hearts, and sharing their lives, and providing for all as any have need.

We tend to think this is an ancient fish tale. But the truth is, It's still plenty relevant in 2025. Because the consumption narrative is alive and well. The lure of the big catch is still irresistible.

Just read the headlines. Corporations, non-human entities, have a stated purpose of growing profits. And the humans that run corporations use their stated purpose to excuse themselves from the

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de-humanizing decisions they make. A new era of diplomacy proclaims humanitarian aid does not serve national interest. And new Herods reimagine Rivas in Palestine.

The text tells us Simon and the others cast their nets into deep waters and they found *everything* Herod promised – the love of self. And you know what? It wasn't enough. Not even close.

And when they made it to back to the shoreline, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Millbrook Baptist Church, may we also find the courage to leave everything and follow Jesus. And may our love of God and love of neighbor, finally, finally, finally be enough.

Amen.