

## Cast Your Nets Again

Luke 5:1-11

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When warm weather comes, do you ever go fishing? If you do, do you want to actually catch some fish? Or do you just want to sit with your line in the water and commune with nature? Those are two really good reasons to go fishing, actually. Nothing wrong with either one. You could come home with dinner. Or you could come home with a nice suntan. If you are just there to commune with nature, it doesn't matter at all how you fish, what kind of bait or tackle you use, or even if you bother to put a line in the water. Just sit in your boat and soak up the rays. It's all good.

But, if you are a commercial fisherman, there's no question about it. The goal is to catch fish, and a lot of them, so HOW you fish really matters. Fishing in the same spot your father showed you 20 years ago might still work, or the fish may have moved on in the last two decades. Using the same fishing gear your father used would certainly feel nostalgic, maybe even bring a tear to your eye. But to really catch fish, you might need some new equipment, a depth finder your father never had, maybe radar, at least a newer rod and reel. If you really want to catch fish, and a lot of fish, you have to be willing to change what you do when the conditions change. If your livelihood depends on your catch today, you can't just do things the way you've always done them. And you can't say, "I tried that once ten years ago and it didn't work." No, you have to be willing to try again, or try something new. You have to find what works, and what works better, and what works now.

In today's scripture, Jesus is on the shore of Lake Gennesaret (that's the Sea of Galilee) and crowds press in on him, to hear him preach. There are some fishermen who have been out fishing all night. Their boats are on the shore, and they are cleaning their nets. Jesus gets into one of the boats – the one belonging to Simon – and they pull just a little way from the shore so he can preach from there without being crowded into the water by his listeners.

When Jesus gets through speaking, he urges Simon to pull out into the deeper water and fish again. Now, let's think about how tired and discouraged these fishermen are. They have been out all night long, casting heavy nets and pulling them in, over and over again. Hours and hours they have done this heavy work. Their shoulders and backs are aching, and they have come home without a catch. Forget selling any fish at the market. They haven't even brought home enough for dinner. They have even started washing their nets. They are ready to go home and go to bed. And here comes this itinerant preacher, talking about God. He commandeers their boat for his pulpit, and then he tells them to go fish again - to take their tired bodies out to the deep water once more and throw their clean nets back into the sea.

Simon, surely a little frustrated at this request, says, "We've been fishing all night and caught absolutely nothing, but ... if you say so." And so, they row out again and put their nets back into the water, and this time they haul up so many fish that their boat can't hold them all. They have to call their partners, James and John, in the other boat to help them bring the catch back to shore. Small wonder, then, that when Jesus – the one who speaks the word of God and brings in the harvest of fish – when this man invites them to join him on the journey, they abandon their boats and their nets and follow him.

This story is Luke's version of the calling of the first disciples. It is the only gospel that includes this story about the miraculous catch of fish as part of the call. As Luke tells it, you can easily understand why a bunch of fishermen might think Jesus was worth following. You can understand why they saw something special in him. You can see how they wouldn't want to let go of that moment when the fish start pouring into the boat and just keep coming. And so, they follow him.

This story interests me this week because we will have a retreat next Saturday to begin to envision how to be the Body of Christ in this community for the next few years, and this story has some reminders for us about what works and what doesn't.

You know that in every church, the classic response to any new idea is either, "We can't do that because we've always done it THIS way" ... or ... "We tried that once, about ten years ago, and it didn't work. No need to try it again." Those are two sure-fire responses that will kill creativity and stifle innovation. "We've always done it THIS way" ... and ... "We tried that once and it didn't work." Or, as Simon says when Jesus tells him to head to the deep water and put out his nets again, "We've been fishing all night and caught nothing." (We tried that once, Jesus, and it didn't work. No need to try it again.) But Jesus cuts through these automatic, discouraged and discouraging responses. He brings the Spirit of God into this fishing trip and the catch is miraculous.

Casting out your nets with the power of the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as casting them in the ordinary way, even if you are fishing in the same place with the same nets. When the Holy Spirit is involved – when the Holy Spirit is in charge – the results will be different. They may even be miraculous.

So, Beloveds, next Saturday, as you begin to imagine what this church can and should do in the coming years, I entreat you to invite the Holy Spirit to be your guide. I know some of you are weary from fishing all night, but please be ready to leave aside every discouraging thought. Do not say, "But we've always done it THIS way." Do not think, "We tried that once and it didn't work." Instead, when you come together next Saturday to capture a glimpse of the future, listen to one another with the conviction that God is speaking somewhere in that conversation. The Holy Spirit will be present, if you invite it, and that Spirit can guide you to the deep waters where the catch can be miraculous. Be open to a new idea. Be ready to cast your nets again in waters you have already fished. Be ready for a miracle.

The future of this church is not in my hands. It is in God's hands, and in yours as God leads you. So, we can all have confidence in the outcome. We don't know what next year holds for this church, or the year after, or the one after that. But God knows. God gathered this church together nearly 200 years ago and has been present throughout its history. God is present with us now.

May the call of our Lord Jesus Christ, his claim on each of our lives and on the future of this church, be as clear as a bell, as clear as it was for Simon and James and John, after a long night of hard work, when Jesus said, "Follow me," and they dropped their nets and followed. And may God guide and prosper the work that we do together in God's name, now and always.

Amen