

Feb. 6, 2022 Epiphany 5C

Luke 5:1-11

On Not Catching Fish

We get a fishing story today. I grew up in a fishing family and I have lots of fishing stories. Here's my favorite. My Dad worked long hours Monday through Saturday managing a BBQ restaurant. Sunday was his day off and that day was spent fishing. He had a regular fishing partner, but as I got older, sometimes he would take me. We would get up way before dawn and be on the lake before the sun came up and we would fish for bass.

We had a little homemade trophy that we competed for. Whoever caught the biggest bass kept the trophy in his room until the next fishing trip.

In 7th grade my parents, put me in Lutheran school and there Jesus and faith and worship became very real to me. I remember approaching my Dad one weekend and asking if we could go fishing later on Sunday so we could go to church. I think he was surprised, because up until that point, there was nothing I liked better than fishing. But he said that was fine and that Mom could take us to church and when we got back, he and I would go fishing. That wasn't really what I had in mind, but I let it go. My mom, my brother and I went to church. When I got home, my dad and I went fishing. I caught the biggest bass and kept the trophy. This went on for several weeks, and during that time that I was going to church and my dad was staying home, I never lost that trophy. I caught the biggest bass every week.

Eventually my dad said, "If I'm ever going to get that trophy back, I guess I better go to church with you." What he meant was, "I want to know what my son has found that he loves more than fishing." So he went, and he found something he loved more than fishing, and he really never left. He joined a Bible study, became an usher, a youth leader, and eventually an elder. The last 7 or 8 years of his life revolved around the Lord and His church. That's my favorite fishing story.

The Bible tells a different kind of fishing story though. This story is about fishermen coming up empty after fishing all night and about a carpenter, who commandeers a boat, preaches a sermon, and tells the fishermen where the fish are.

After hundreds of pounds of fish are finally caught, a fisherman, Simon (aka Peter), immediately resigns from fishing and starts fishing for people.

I told you it was a different kind of fishing story. If there's anything to learn from this story, it's **"why some people don't catch fish."**

Some people don't catch fish because they refuse to go into deep water. Jesus told Simon, *"Put out into deep water,"* (Luke 5:4).

Everybody knows the schools of big fish are in the deeper water. And the first rule of fishing is you've got to go where the fish are. But we shouldn't limit this to fish only. Jesus was teaching a spiritual principal.

We could substitute fish for abundance or wisdom or love, healing or peace. All those things we want in abundance. Some people don't catch these things because they simply refuse to go deep.

Deep water is where the increase is. Deep water takes faith. Deep water is a risk. Focus of mind and heart are needed.

The visibility in deep black water is next to nothing. You've got to trust the words and directions of others who have passed through deep water to make it there. Jesus is always inviting people to the deeper end of things.

But we like the shallows. Shallow water is pleasant. It tickles our ankles when we walk in it. The minnows and the half-grown fish gather there. You can see all the way to the bottom in shallow water.

Staying in shallow water is such a temptation. Shallow water doesn't cost much; it doesn't take a whole lot of courage. But Simon knew the minnows couldn't feed him. They couldn't fill him. The minnows weren't the desire of his heart. The deep water of faith is where those things we say we want are swimming around. The shallow is where we begin the adventure, not where we finish.

There is a time for classes and listening and a time to live what we've learned, a time to receive and a time to give sacrificially, a time to worship the Lord in church, and a time to be church and lead the world in the worship of the Lord.

Deep water is where we have to go to get what God has for us.

Some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to catch fish. When Jesus tells Simon, "Let's go to the deep water," he doesn't

stop there. He says, "*and let down the nets for a catch.*" What an encouragement. There is an expectation of a catch.

This is a word for us there who go to church regularly. Week after week we go to the deep water of worship, but do we go preparing for a catch? Do we go believing that a blessing is just waiting for us? Or do we go to appease a spouse or be seen by others or, worse, just out of dumb habit? We need to come into God's presence with expectations.

Expectation is the child of faith. "The substance of things hoped for," is the phrase the book of Hebrews uses. No expectation, no real faith. When we say we believe in God, we are not saying I am agreeing with some abstract idea; we're saying we expect the things that God has promised to us.

We're saying that I'm a partner with the "giver of every good gift." And among those gifts God has promised us are fruitfulness and fish and forever.

I like how Jesus keeps pushing Simon's boundaries. "Leave the shore, Simon. Go into the deep, Simon." These are easy in comparison to "Expect something to happen, Simon." Jesus was calling Simon to risk being disappointed in God.

Some people don't catch fish because they don't go to the deep water, and some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to. **But some people don't catch fish because they know more about fish than God.**

Simon almost makes this mistake. He tells Jesus in what is probably an exasperated tone, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets*" (Luke 5:5). You can almost hear the, "Aren't you a carpenter moonlighting as a preacher anyway?"

Some people think they know more about fish than God. It happens to all of us sometimes. It's not that we actually think we know more than God; it's just that we behave that way.

Simon, for just a split second, almost forgot that God is God. Modern culture doesn't really have any use for the word humility; it goes back to the *Enlightenment* when Western culture told itself that it could know everything. Funny, huh?

Our information highway is repeating that humor all over again. Simon, at that crucial intersection we all come to over and over again in life, decided that he didn't know everything, that his present emptiness and frustration had made him ready to learn. Now there's a good definition of humility, a readiness to learn.

People say that the net full of fish is the miracle of this story, but I disagree. The real miracle of this story is that Simon decided that God was God and that he would live that way beginning immediately.

Just look at what Simon says before the miracles begin to happen, "Yet, Lord if you say so...." My frustration is real, Lord. My pain is real. My emptiness is real. My despair is real, all real, Lord, and yet. And, yet, you are God and I am not.

That's when fruitfulness begins to happen, that's when we will start catching fish, when we decide that God is God, when our lips and our lives agree that "God's foolishness is wiser than any human wisdom."

Simon's full net is just a consequence of that fact, of that revelation. What a freedom Simon got that day, what a joy...that "God is the maker of heaven and earth..." and that all by himself.

So look for the deep water this week. Discern where God is calling you. Expect God to act. And remember that God is God and you're not.

Now let's go fishing.