

Put Out Into Deep Water

Luke 5:1-11

Key Verse: 5:4

by Steve Stasinos

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

As we learned last week, Jesus had a "must" in his heart: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God." This led him to go around all the land, preaching and teaching the people. But to reach beyond, to other cities, including Chicago, IL, Jesus would call and raise disciples. He had several people hanging around him. How would these part-time followers of Jesus become committed disciples who would lay down their lives for the preaching of the gospel? I want to think about that today. We can learn a lot from the example of Jesus and Simon Peter. How did Jesus deepen the relationship with Peter, who became his top disciple and rock of the church? It begins here on the shores of Lake Gennesaret.

First, Jesus teaches the crowd from Simon's boat (1-3). Let's read verse 1. "One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God..." Luke is the only one who calls this the "Lake of Gennesaret." We know it better as the "Sea of Galilee." Gennesaret is near to Capernaum. Jesus was not in the town, but by the lake. Jesus' teaching ministry expanded beyond the limits of the synagogues. What about this crowd? The ESV reads, "On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God." They were leaning in, eager to hear the word of God from Jesus. Doubtless, they had urgent needs, just like us today. Perhaps they had a housing crisis and economic downturn too. There were surely many health problems and broken families. Maybe that was why they came to Jesus at first. We don't know. Luke emphasizes they are now listening to the word of God with eager desire. This is why Jesus was sent: to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. This is the fundamental and greatest need of people in every generation. Why? The word of God didn't satisfy their hunger problem. It didn't remove the harsh rule of the Romans over them, or lighten the burden of their daily labor. It didn't solve their marriage issues, or singleness issues, or unemployment. Still, they were drawn to Jesus' teaching like a deer thirsts for streams of water. Why?

Luke says, "...and listening to the word of God." The word of God is what people truly need. Jesus taught this earlier, saying, "People do not live on bread alone" (Lk 4:4). In John 3, Jesus meets with Nicodemus. This guy had everything: wealth,

position, honor, religion, and great learning. Yet he was not happy. He could not see the kingdom of God. He could not enter the kingdom of God. Through Jesus' words, Nicodemus came to know the truth about himself. In Jesus' words, there was hope for Nicodemus. He became a closet-follower of Jesus. The word of God is Jesus himself (Jn 1:1). He promises every one of us: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (Jn 6:35) There was a woman who was thirsty. She had wanted to marry and enjoy a happy family life, but after 5 failed marriages, and a lazy live-in boyfriend, her dream was over. But Jesus met her at a well. Jesus' words led her to know her root problem, and Jesus as her Savior. She became an evangelist to her hometown people, and a blessed woman. There was a young man who lived a meaningless life in suburban America. Although he had everything provided for him by good parents and should be thankful, he was rebellious toward God, his parents, and all authority. He was caught in the snare of the devil, and became a slave to immorality and drugs. But through one word of Jesus, he was set free. Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:6) He repented all his sins, and began to follow Jesus the way. He now gives his life to serve campus mission, and to making America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. More important than tax credits, healing, or bread, people need one word of God. Jesus taught the people the word of God.

Now I told you we were going to look at Jesus' and Simon's relationship. But you get that bit about the word of God as a bonus. Let's read verse 2. "He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets." Jesus, while he was teaching, noticed these two boats, and the fishermen who owned them. They were not able to listen to his teaching, as they were busy washing their nets. This was proper work procedure that had to be finished before they could go home. Look at verse 3. "He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat." Jesus knew Simon. He had healed his mother-in-law, and had stayed at his house, turning it into an overnight trauma clinic for the people of Capernaum. Jesus asked Simon to put out a little from shore. Why might Jesus have done this? There are two reasons.

In the first place, Jesus needed Simon's boat in order to teach the people. While on the boat, away from the shore, he would be able to teach without being drowned out by the multitude. We learn from Jesus that when an environment is not conducive to teaching the Bible, we don't give up. We make a way. When the Bible house at UIC was being constructed, we found a way to study the Bible, meeting at the campus, in people's basements, and even local restaurants.

In the second place, Jesus was interested in Simon. Simon was busy with work. Too busy to slow down and listen to Jesus' teaching. But Jesus wanted him to listen. Jesus intervened in his busy life by stepping into his boat. Jesus singled Simon out. Up to this point, Simon's involvement with Jesus was on his terms: he chose to follow Jesus, and he chose to invite Jesus to his home, and asked him to heal his mother-in-law. Now, Jesus was stepping into Simon's life on Jesus' terms. What would Simon do? "Not now, Jesus. I'm a little busy with these nets here. I will make time for you after work, maybe." I mean, Jesus should understand. This is Simon's job! But instead, Simon obeyed Jesus, interrupting his busy day and schedule. He was flexible toward his daily tasks, in order to obey Jesus. Through Simon's decision, Jesus was able to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus steps into our boats too. It isn't always the most convenient time. Will we put out a little from shore, and allow him to preach the good news of the kingdom of God? If washing the nets is your priority over Jesus, then no. This reflects our attitude toward Jesus. Some put work or school as the top priority. Bible study and listening to Jesus must wait. Practically speaking, school or work becomes their master. Jesus understands. He gets involved, through Bible study, a conference, a friend. Suddenly, there he is, in your boat, with a large crowd of people on your campus, all desperate to hear the word of life. And he is saying, "Would you put out a little from shore? Would you change your plan to do what I want you to do, even in this small thing?" Are you going to be the environment maker he can use? This is the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Jesus.

Second, the miraculous catch of fish (4-10a). What do you think of when you hear the word boat? I remember my grandpa's rowboat, or a canoe. In 1986, a 2,000 year old fishing boat was found off the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. This was a large boat (26.5x7.5x4.5 ft), holding up to 15 people, with storage for fish. Simon was the captain of such a boat, with his stalwart crew, and Jesus onboard. Let's read verse 4. "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'" Jesus had finished preaching the good news of the kingdom of God to the crowds, and also to the fishermen in the boat. Instead of saying, "Take us home, Captain!" Jesus says, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." The footnote says plural for "let down," meaning Jesus wanted them all to take a catch of fish. Jesus, while busy teaching the people, noticed the situation of these fishermen. He saw that their nets were empty. Jesus had compassion on them in their situation. He wanted to serve them. Jesus is not indifferent to our situation. We can trust Jesus.

Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into deep water." This command is directed at Simon alone. Already, Simon had obeyed and put out a little from shore. Jesus is challenging him to go deeper. Jesus isn't content with superficial and part-time followers. He wants us to go deeper in our relationship with him. Last year at the Purdue conference, several heard Jesus' words of challenge for world mission. When the call went out for missionaries, they crowded the stage. This summer, several have gone as short term missionaries, and others are attending the European Summer Bible Conference. They are responding to Jesus' challenge to grow deeper in a relationship with him. Jesus is saying to us right now in our situation, "Put out into deep water." What will be our response?

How would Simon respond to Jesus command? In the movie Star Wars, Han Solo told Princess Leia, "Look, your Worshipfulness, let's get one thing straight. I take orders from just one person: me." But that isn't what Simon said. Let's read verse 5. "Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'" Simon calls Jesus "Master" or "Sir!" Simon trusted Jesus' authority over his life. He mentions how hard he and his companions had worked, with nothing to show. They were likely discouraged. Simon didn't expect another try would yield better results, since it was now day and they fish at night. This is the situation in which Jesus' command came: Simon was discouraged, tired, and ready to go home. Simon was not inclined to do this. So why does he agree? Simon says, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Simon honors Jesus' word as the word of God to be obeyed. Simon didn't say, "we," but, "I will let down the nets." This was a personal decision in which Simon exercised his will in obedience to Jesus' word: "Put out into deep water and let down the nets." This act of obedience was an act of faith and trust in Jesus, who gave the command.

What happened when they obeyed? Verses 6-7 read, "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink." Wow! What an amazing event! The nets were breaking, the boats were sinking, and they were all rich! The night of failure was immediately forgotten. How proud their wives would be at such a catch! What compassion Jesus had for these men, their families, and their self-esteem. Sometimes we get the impression that Jesus isn't interested in our daily life problems, just what we do for him. This leads to a double life at worst, and at best we feel pulled between work and ministry, in a deadly dance of exhaustion. My mom used to say, "Steve, you're burning the candle at both ends!" But Jesus wants to be involved in our lives; successes and failures. He wants to be Lord in every

sphere of life, whether in our studies, our work, or our personal lives. This is the relationship he wants to have with you. When Jesus is Lord over your life, the kingdom of God has come to you! The secret of a whole and happy life is to yield to Jesus' Lordship in all areas.

How would they respond to such a catch? Read verses 8-10a. "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' 9For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners." They were astonished. This was not just luck; they were all led to the same obvious conclusion: this was a miracle! Luke writes, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees." Luke calls him Simon Peter, the name Jesus gave him. This was a turning point in Simon Peter's life. Simon lost interest in the fish, and was focused on Jesus. This amazing miracle didn't distract him from Jesus, as some become distracted in the time of blessing. He said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Simon Peter recognized Jesus as Lord. This event opened Simon Peter's eyes to see who Jesus is: the Lord of even the fish and the sea. Jesus is the Lord God. But Peter's response is negative: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Perhaps compared to others, like James and John, Simon felt pretty good about himself. But before the Lord, Simon knew himself as he truly was; he was a sinful man. He studied hard, got a degree, a career, and lived well. But he lived as though God were not living. In view of this miracle, he realized how sinful he was. Although his labor and work had produced a miraculous catch, he was not proud. He gave glory to Jesus as Lord, and found himself as a sinner. Jesus said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." When Peter responded by obeying Jesus' words of command, he met the living God there on his boat. His life was changed forever. Jesus is involved in our lives. But he has a greater goal in mind than just blessing us with a miraculous catch. He wants to reveal himself to us as he is, and to reveal who we are before him. This is the foundation of a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is involving himself in your life even through this message. Do you hear his voice? "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." How will you respond? Third, Jesus calls Simon to be his disciple (10b-11). Read verse 10b. "Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.'" TNIV says, "Fish for people." Again, Jesus singles out Simon. The call to discipleship is personal, and came out of the relationship Jesus established with Peter. Jesus is Lord; Simon is a sinner. Simon had every reason to be afraid. He deserved nothing but condemnation before the Holy God. But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid." Jesus came to call sinners, just like Simon. Jesus embraces Simon with comfort and hope. Why did Jesus have such compassion and hope for Simon? Jesus had hope

for Peter on the basis of the gospel. Simon would now live as a fisherman for Jesus. Being Jesus' disciple is not like picking a career or a major. Due to our sins, we are powerless, fearful, full of failure and incapable of serving Jesus. But there is comfort and hope for sinners in the gospel. Jesus forgives our sins, delivers us from our enemies and enables us to live as his disciple. In the gospel of Jesus there is hope for us to serve Jesus as his disciples today. Zechariah song explains this purpose in Jesus' coming: "Praise be to the Lord the God of Israel... He has raised up a horn of salvation for us ... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Lk 1:68-75).

Jesus also said, "From now on." "Fisherman" was Simon's primary identity and title, and his task was pulling fish out of the water with his nets. Jesus is giving Simon a new purpose and identity. Simon cannot choose this life; it is given by Jesus alone. Jesus said, "From now on you will fish for people." The root idea of "catch" or "fish for" is a Greek word (ἰσχυρίζομαι • ἰσχυρίζομαι • 2221) that means "to capture" or "take alive." In the negative sense it is used in 2 Timothy 2:26, where Paul says the devil has taken men captive to obey the devil's will. But Jesus tells Simon Peter that now he will be capturing people for Jesus. He used to pull fish out of the water to eat them. Now he would pull people from the depths of sin and death and deliver them to life. Just as Jesus captured the heart of Simon, and brought him to the core of the gospel, so Simon would now preach the gospel of salvation that leads people to Jesus. Jesus' metaphor, "Fish for people," has deep meaning when we compare it with gospel preaching. But it is not like putting a worm on a line and sleeping all afternoon. Nor is it like wrestling a giant fish like in "Old Man and the Sea." Jesus is talking about net fishing. This is labor-intensive and time consuming. It requires a work ethic more than ability. It emphasizes persistence and dedication to the task, regardless of results. But the stakes are much higher, as we are not fishing for tomorrow's sushi, but the lives of people. The gospel message itself, like the net, has the power to capture men's hearts. As gospel preachers, we must rely on the power of the gospel, and continue to share it through our words, our actions, and our lifestyles, just like Jesus did. This is the primary purpose of Jesus' disciples, to fish for people. This is a challenge, and will be hard work. But this will also draw us close to Jesus, going deeper and deeper.

Look at verse 11. "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him." They recognized the great opportunity Jesus gave them, and they obeyed his call. Why did they do so? Obedience comes from love. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (Jn 14:15). They loved Jesus because Jesus loved them first (1Jn 4:19). This was not obligation, but recognition

of Jesus' great love for them and his identity as Lord, revealed through the miraculous catch of fish. Their leaving everything behind reveals their full commitment to the identity and future Jesus has given them. I was reminded of Jesus' calling on my life, and how joyfully and willingly I left everything to follow Jesus, both in 1997 when I left home to follow Jesus, the way, and again in 2008 when I left my job to serve Purdue and UIC ministry. This was in view of Jesus' love, and his supernatural authority.

In this passage, Jesus calls Peter to be his disciple. This isn't about secular or sacred professions, but about relationship with Jesus, and the reality of his calling. Jesus wants to have such a deepening relationship with you. He does so by challenging us with his words. Jesus is saying to each of us right where we are: "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." How can you go deeper in love with Jesus? How is he challenging your faith? God help us each to not only hear his challenge, but to respond with faith and obedience.