

Title: “It’s Not About the Fish”

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Luke 5:1-11

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Service Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Cor 14:12b-20; Luke 5:1-11

Our sinful nature often times petitions God to bless us with worldly gifts. But the true blessing is in our recognition of Jesus, the forgiveness he offers, and the joy of following him.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesare.

A crowd. A crowd comprised of people, many people, each with their own life, each with their own story. Maybe there was a man who was struggling with chronic pain; maybe a another who lost his business and had no way to feed his family. Maybe there were widows who struggled in a world that dismissed them. There might have been children, abandoned by their parents and left to fend for themselves. And intertwined with them might have been families who were living the best days of their lives – celebrating health or comfort, or a host of other blessings. And maybe there were others in-between – living day to day with general effort, general comfort, and just living.

And they were all drawn to him because each of them needed something from him, even if they didn’t know it was. The lonely were searching for meaning, purpose. The poor seeking nourishment for they were empty, hungry. The hurt and ill searching for healing and restoration, needing relief. The rich and those blessed with health and resources were searching for affirmation, for someone to share their joy with. And the abandoned? They were searching for connection, for something or someone to be connected with. They were all searching, all seeking something that the world seemed not to fully provide. For every earthly response, every earthly question answered, there continued to exist a void of some sort. They all felt it, each in their own way, and maybe many of them didn’t recognize their needs consciously, but they all had their own, and they were all seeking.

A crowd. A crowd with as many stories as people, and all gathered together to be in the presence of Jesus. Gathered, not *as* a community, but as individuals. Not gathered to *be* community, but to continue to *be* individuals. Searching for answers for their own lives and expecting to go their own ways once those answers were found. But this was not the desire of God, it never was. We were made to live in community with each other, in a community centered around him.

Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

These people did not gather themselves; Jesus gathered them – through the circumstances – *the stories* of their lives he called each of them that day. They probably had no awareness of it, but through the workings of God, they were called into his presence on that lakeshore. And Jesus was

there waiting for them, ready to serve. This is what had been lost in the first days of creation, when man decided for himself that a life lived apart from God was a life worth living. And so man separated, went on his own. And the community scattered, each to his own life, forming his own story – one of individualism, one of selfish pursuit. And the stories he formed were stories of wealth and power, stories of conquer and might. But woven into these stories were threads of pain, of loss and suffering, threads of sinfulness and selfishness. And so man began searching, searching for a way to remove and restore all that had wrongly been woven, all that had been causing pain. But the more he tried, the more he wove, the worse the fabric became, until it no longer reflected God's image, God's woven story.

But God would not abandon his greatest love and so sent his only son into the world to call and to gather. He sent his son to gather all these frayed and tattered fabrics, stained with the sins of humanity. He sent his son to gather all these stories – these *lives* – to himself. He would take each one and carry them to the cross, where through his sacrifice he would cleanse them, washing the threads of suffering, of individualism, mending the threads of loss and abandonment. But even more than that, he would weave them back together to form one fabric, one community. And these stories, each of individual life, would no longer be separated but be joined together, stitched by his blood, and woven into the greatest story, the greatest fabric of all.

He gathers us in the same way, this morning. We are individuals, each with a story – a story that includes joy and sorry, flourishment and suffering, but stories that the world demands we author on our own. It teaches that true happiness, true value can only be found when the lives we live, the suffering we endure, and the success we find, can be realized *only* through our own strength. But that is not the desire of God, it never was. And the life and the suffering and the resurrection of Jesus proves that. We are to be one body, gathered together because he has called us, not just to himself but to each other. We are to share in each other's stories, share in each other's pain, share in each other's joy – together. And do so as a community anchored in Christ.

⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But Jesus did not depart from Simon, nor does he depart from us. Just as he called them to him that day, he continues to call us. Just as he gathered them together, he gathers us. And just as he gave Simon partners to help with his struggles, he gives us a community to do the same. He does this not just so that we can, as individuals, be united with Christ. Yes! What a wonderful, glorious reality this is – that he has given each of us salvation! Yes, what a reason to worship! But he calls us to himself so that we may be joined as one community, one body, to share in the joys and sufferings of each other, to serve each other in the same way that he served us. To carry each other's burdens, to weave our own fabrics of our individual lives into a communal fabric, one that reflects that which Jesus sewed together through the cross.

You see, on that day when Jesus gathered the people together, and when Jesus filled Simon's boats, it was not about the fish – it never was.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for gathering us here today, just as You gathered that crowd on the shore so long ago. Unite us in the community of Your love, weaving our stories into the greater fabric of Your grace. Help us to share in one another's joys and burdens, and to reflect Christ's selfless service in all we do, as one body, anchored in Him.
Amen.