

Leaving it all Behind
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The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Luke 5:1-11

Bear with me as I share my vast store of knowledge about fishing.

Now before you laugh, I've not only read the book and watched the film "The Perfect Storm", but I even met one of the fishermen it was based upon - Linda Greenlawn, the Captain of the Hannah Boden. She's the one who called out the Mayday when the Andrea Gail went down.

She was at the same community clambake on Isle au Haut in Maine as we were about 6 summers ago. I was a little too nervous to introduce myself, she being a local celebrity and all.

And I've seen lobster boats come in to Stonington Harbor, and I've heard first hand tales of the sea from actual commercial Fishermen, so I want a little bit of respect for all I am going to share with you... So, are you ready? Here's what I know...

Number one - Fishing is hard work.

Number two - Fishing can be dangerous work.

Number three - You're not always guaranteed a good day out on the water.

Number four - You're often placing a burden on your family.

Well, I think that's about it. That's what I know.

It doesn't really spell it out in the gospel story, but being a commercial fisherman is really hard work. To make a living you have to invest everything you've got in what you're doing. Your time, (and the text doesn't talk about this but) also your wealth.

When you think about it, that fishing boat was probably Simon's greatest asset, the thing in which all of his money had been invested. But it's how he could make a living that he could support himself with, and his family.

So keep that all in mind that he's just had a hard night out on the water. He fishes at night, so the fish can't see them coming (turns out, fish don't like to be caught). And he's worked a lot, and maybe the morning sun was beating down on his head, or maybe there was rain that fell... we don't

know. As day breaks, there's not much to show for all his effort, just empty nets in need of repair and a good cleaning.

So Simon does what is right at the end of his shift, and comes back in to shore to clean and pack up. I imagine he just wants to be done with it, to go home and see his family and relax.

Now the story starts to get interesting.

Jesus approaches his boat. Did they know each other? I think so. Simon first met Jesus back in chapter 4 when he came over his house and healed his mother-in-law. Jesus has been growing his reputation as a teacher; the people know about him and they want to hear what he says.

So Peter's there on the shore, working on his nets. Tired. And Jesus walks out to him and gets into the boat and says, "*would you please push it out into the water?*"

Now, this may be an aside, but it's relevant to tell you about one of my quirks... I don't like it when people invade my personal space. Honestly, there have been moments during this pandemic that I've been happy to stand 6 feet away from others.

And while, yes, it's true that I'm also a hugger, it takes me time to get to know a person before I warm up enough to get that close to them.

My need for personal space extends to my workspace.

When I'm at my desk in my home office of the front hallway of the parsonage, I don't want anyone walking behind my chair. Oh, my husband or daughter or the dogs will still do it. It's just that there's about 2 feet between me and the wall and it makes me nervous to share that with anyone – even my own family!

I had one past colleague when I worked in marketing who would wander behind my desk to talk to me. Even though I had a fairly big office where this person could be comfortable either sitting or standing, this person always crept up behind me. I'm still not sure whether it was because this individual had no sense of personal space or boundaries or if he was trying to pull a power move on me.

One day, I finally told him to stop. Maybe I was a little rude about it. I told him, "*it's a big office, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't come behind my desk when you have to speak with me.*"

Why I'm thinking about it is this... Peter's boat was his desk. And Jesus came and invaded his personal space. If I was him, I'd have asked Jesus what he thinks he's doing getting all up in my boat.

This isn't the SS Minnow going out on a three-hour pleasure cruise!

Now, Simon may not have had my particular hang-ups, but I think he would have definitely felt a sense of ownership... this was HIS boat.

But Jesus doesn't care. And amazingly, Simon complies with his request, and he pushes off, and off into the water they go.

And then the miracle occurs. They catch so many fish.

And here's another shocking thing... Simon Peter's response.

He doesn't have what I think would be a more common reaction (at least in today's world), which is to think, *I just hit the lottery. Let's get the catch in to market and make some money.*

Or even if he had been a more thoughtful person about the needs around him he might have said, *oh my gosh now we can feed everybody now!*

But no! The fish do not matter to him... a professional fisherman. Him and three others, in that moment, literally drop what they are doing to follow Jesus.

I'm not sure why. At this point he does not know that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. But he senses there's something special here. And he is willing to set aside everything, to drop everything, to follow Jesus. That's a heck of a lot of charisma, a lot of presence, a lot of holiness.

Some of you might be sitting here thinking, *"Well, I'm not Simon. I don't have that kind of faith, I'm not that kind of holy person who's going to drop everything to follow Jesus."*

I think what we have here is another example that the lectionary, through the wonders of happenstance, coincidence, good fortune or providence, provides us with the exact lesson we need to hear on a particular day.

Because this passage is perfect for an annual meeting Sunday.

You may not be selling your boats, and giving up everything, and walking away from your job to do the work of the church, but you are making sacrifices.

In a little while, we will be electing members of this congregation to be officers and committee members. And for that, we say *"thank you"*.

And there are others of you who are worship leaders, or who packed up hundreds of socks to give out at St. George's, or are ushers, or who worked on the heat or the sound, or read a story to Sunday school kids over zoom, or knit a prayer shawl or did 100 other things that make this congregation work.

YOU are following in Simon Peter's footsteps.

One of the lessons these days have taught us, is that we must prepare for the unexpected. For over 250 years the members of this church have done just that.

How many of you fish? Okay, I can't see raised hands at home, but at least there are a couple of you here. So, you're now going to be fisherfolk. All of you. That's because the invitation that Jesus extended to Peter is also extended to each and every one of us.

Jesus doesn't make us do anything. Christ isn't looking for checked-out zombies who will follow every word of scripture perfectly. Instead, he is looking for faithful people who may have doubts and questions, and yet are stirred by the message of the gospel. People who can see, like Simon Peter, that the world can be better, and that taking a risk is worth it.

Jesus' mission does not wait until we think we are ready. The need for the gospel in this broken world is far too urgent. We are called right now... in spite of our frailty, failures, and doubts; in the midst of our ordinary, busy, complicated lives.

Jesus' word to Simon Peter is also a word to us: "*Do not be afraid.*" This is Jesus' mission, and our job is to trust that he will keep working with us and through us, "catching" others as he has caught us... into the deep, wide net of God's mercy and love.

Amen.