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Follow Me
Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus^[a] was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee), and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning 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 that they began to sink.⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Most people are ***familiar with today’s story***, especially the phrase, *follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*. That particular phrase is actually found in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:1, but here in the Gospel of Luke, it’s a little different, with different details to the story. And if we ***stop and pay attention***, we just might find an ***inspiring and compelling reason*** to follow Jesus today.

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

Maybe it helps to think about what following Jesus is NOT.

Increasingly the fastest growing group in America is the ***NONES***— people who when asked their religious affiliation say: NONE.

But, surprisingly, they consider themselves spiritual people, often believing in God, but ***on their own terms***.

I was reading an article last week about a mom who was so proud that she had raised her kids *without any concept of sin*.

Sounds bizarre, right?

She was teaching them to be ethical, moral, compassionate, caring for the needy and the environment, but without any relationship to church, or the idea of sin.

Why?

Because she was raised in a strict Midwestern fundamentalist family where the idea of sin hung over her head all the time.

She lived in fear of hell every day of her life, and was punished severely for every mistake.

It *pushed her so far away from God* that she vowed to shield her own children from it, which she did.

But at what cost?

Without the concept of sin, how do we *understand our need for God?*

Without sin, *we're on our own*—no need for salvation, or redemption, or new life.

Which works ...until it doesn't.

People like this can *care deeply about right and wrong*,

And teach their children to be compassionate people.

But their *solution to the brokenness* in this world is

to *just work harder* to bring justice and overcome the brokenness.

Which is a tall order for humans like us.

We've all tried this at one time or another, right?

Being in *charge* of the world around us.

Trying to *fix everything and everyone*.

Problem is, eventually we *wear out*.

We break down.

Eventually we *encounter a crisis that we cannot fix*,

no matter how hard we try—and life starts to fall apart.

And the *choice becomes*----

reach beyond yourself, or give up because you've done all you can.

At Bible study, we were talking about the most transforming aspect of our faith, and for me, *it's the body of Christ, the church*.

Growing up in a difficult home situation with my biological mom,

the local church became my true family, my life-line.
 I wouldn't be here today, without that community.
 It's one *reason I am a pastor*—to help people receive that gift,
 not just of God's grace in Christ,
 but of *God's grace in the body of Christ, the church.*

But it's a *hard sell* sometimes, because our culture values *rugged individualism*.
 We want to *handle* things ourselves, be in *charge*,
 and keep everything under *control*.
 We spend a ton of money and time *learning about self-help*.
 But where is that line between *self-care and being self-centered?*

Many of us, myself included, *do not do a good job at self-care*.
 We work too much, don't eat right or exercise enough,
 and find ourselves worn out.

We do need to learn self-care.
 But we *do not need to become self-centered*.
 There's a big *difference*, right?

In fact, as Christians we could argue that *being self-centered*
does not lead to self-care, nor the care of anyone else.
 We are called to *keep our eyes on Someone else, Jesus*.

We are called to *love God, and our neighbor as ourselves*.
 To do that, we need to know that we are beloved children of God,
 not defined by anything we do, or anything we have.
 And we must be willing to love our neighbors.

The *world encourages more time focused on self*.
Jesus encourages more time focused on Him.
 Which leads to self-care, and love of neighbor, and love of God.

So, what does it mean to Follow Jesus?
 What if it's less about finding ourselves, or our own way in life?
 And more about FOLLOWING Jesus—focusing on Him?

I have often wondered what was going on *in the heart of Simon Peter*,
 before he left to follow Jesus that day.
 Was he happy as a fisherman?

Did he think he could handle life on his own?
***Or had he realized he needed something more?
 Someone more?***

They say that ***God meets us right where we are.***
 God shows up in ***ordinary times and places.***
 Which is so true.
 And it's true in this story from Luke.

Jesus didn't wait until Simon showed up in the synagogue and responded to a sermon he preached.

***He went outside the synagogue (there's a lesson here, folks!),
 to where Simon worked,*** and asked if he could borrow his boat to teach some people on the lakeshore.

He arrived as Simon and his friends were done with a hard day's work, they had caught nothing, and were now cleaning their nets to put them away for the night.

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it mean taking ***risks***? Doing something ***new***?
 Even if it seems crazy?

Jesus the carpenter and preacher, came to Simon's office at the lake, and proceeded to give this fisherman advice on fishing!

Can't you just ***feel Simon's hesitation*** when Jesus says, "***Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.***"⁵ Simon says, "***Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.***"

The carpenter says—***why not one more time, to the deeper water?***
 Kind of like when your mom says, just one more try—for me?

And ⁶ ***When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.*** They had to call out for ***help***, and another boat to bring it all in!

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means going ***deeper***?

Beyond the ***shallow, comfortable water***,
 where you can see to the bottom?

Think about that—what would that mean ***in your life*** today?

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means ***letting go*** of ourselves?

Our ideas? Our plans?

Our way—that we thought was working...until it wasn't.

One lesson we see to see time and again from the parting of the Red Sea to the Jordan River crossings—is that ***God shows up when we give up.***

Jesus comes to our aid when we ***reach the end of ourselves.***

Make sense, right?

We really know we need Jesus, when we have ***nothing left.***

Some us are taken to the very edge of life that way.

We don't know how long they had been fishing unsuccessfully—

Luke says that they had worked all night without catching anything.

But I wonder if it had been longer than that.

Maybe Simon and the others were in a real dry spell.

Like a farmer losing a crop.

I wonder if Simon had come to the end of himself.

Because that's often ***when God arrives.***

When we realize we cannot do it alone.

When have ***you been there?***

Are you there right now?

Have you ***realized you can't do it all alone?***

Have you ***called out for Jesus?***

And are you ***ready—for Him to show up?***

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means ***leaving behind***---a lot.

Our way, our control, our past.

What if it means leaving behind the lives we created,
in order to ***find the life God has waiting for us!***

At the end of this story, Simon Peter and his friends do something astounding.

They reel in that huge catch of fish, and then---***they walk away.***

They left everything and followed Jesus.

This is a part of the story that we know, but do we understand it?

They left the lives they had created,

the lives they knew, that they were comfortable with---to follow Jesus—

and *find the kind of life he offered.*

Were they afraid?

I would guess so, since Jesus says that famous 4 words we hear all throughout God's Word: ***Do not be afraid.***

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

Catching People.

What does that *mean*?

Matthew and Mark say *I'll make you fishers of people.*

The Greek here is not about reeling in fish, *zogreo* is about ***catching or rescuing.***

Jesus was offering a way of life much ***deeper and more meaningful*** than just bringing in fish.

He was offering them an opportunity ***to join God's work—rescuing people.***

Which is ***not an easy road.***

There's a reason Jesus says that those who want to follow me must ***deny*** themselves, take up their ***cross*** and follow (Matt 16:24).

He tells his disciples that the way will be rocky,

they won't always be treated right, some will reject them (Matt 10).

How did those early disciples ***get past their fear, and follow?***

Simon Peter's words are important.

When he follows Jesus' advice to put the net back out,

and it comes in overflowing with fish---he is ***overwhelmed. Humbled.***

He suddenly has an ***awareness*** of who stands before him.

He knew Jesus was a great teacher, but here he realizes ***this is God.***

Simon fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;

That realization creates a ***repentant and humble heart.***

Get away--I am a sinful man.

You are God. I am not.

This is what ***compels him to obey and follow Jesus.***

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means that *we too, fall down* at Jesus' feet,
and *recognize* who He is, and who we are?

We are sinners, in need of a Savior.

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means we *expect God to show up?*

And *do great things?*

What if it means that we *expect miracles?*

The poet *Annie Dillard* used to say that
when we come to worship we really should be wearing helmets, and life-
preservers, and belts in the pews,
expecting God to show up!

I don't think Peter expected Jesus that day.

And it doesn't sound like he expected much in the way of fish!

He probably let those nets out into the deep water because he was too tired and
exhausted to argue.

What about us?

Do we expect great things—from our great God?

Do we call on Jesus, and then ***expect blessings? Miracles?***

Life beyond our imagination?

Or, are we so reliant on ourselves,
that we ***miss the awe and wonder of following Jesus?***

Do we ***expect God to break*** in and do something amazing, in our lives?

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means we ***listen and obey?***

Even if it doesn't make sense.

Even if we are tired, and this nudge from God sounds crazy.

What if it means we ***take our eyes off ourselves, and our circumstances,***
to focus on Jesus?

To listen? And obey?

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

What if it means going to the deep waters of life?

Putting out the nets, and expecting a miracle?

Yet, how often do we come to *worship, without expecting much?*

Without the expectation that God will show up?

Without much hope of being different when we leave?

How often do we *pray, not expecting much?*

We pray, but we don't really expect a miracle.

We pray and then forget to pay attention to the surprising answers!

What would it mean in *your life—to expect great things from God?*

How can you do that?

How can we open our lives to God's possibilities?

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

One pastor I read this week says that

“following Jesus is risky business with great rewards”.

Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 1, pg. 335.

Isn't that the truth?

What if Following Jesus means

taking risks,

going out into the deep water,

opening our hearts to ***repentance, and obedience,***

leaving behind things we don't need,

and ***expecting great things*** from Jesus?

What does that look like in your life—right now?

Where are you being asked to take a ***leap of faith?***

Or to ***go deeper?***

How is God ***humbling*** you?

And ***asking you to obey?***

What are you being asked to ***leave behind?***

And ***what are you expecting*** from life with Jesus?

Friends the ***Good News of the Gospel*** is this:

Following Jesus means ***real life, deeper life,***

A life of faith, with ***unbelievable rewards!***

When we step out in faith,
When turn our eyes off ourselves and onto Jesus,
We find that *the life we can create is nothing compared to the life
Offered to us from Jesus Christ!*
May we *Follow the One* who offers real life.
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.