

A Big Catch

Luke 5:1-11

February 6, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

This projector we have here in the sanctuary. I'm so thankful we have it, and had it ready to go when we all the sudden became a part online congregation. Really, I'm thankful for it. However. It regularly confounds me. Rarely it works the first time I plug it into the computer. Sometimes it works the second time. Sometimes the fifth time. Sometimes the tenth time. Sometimes the twenty fifth time, and sometimes I just wait till next week. As far as I can figure, there's no reason for this. It should work the first time I plug it into the computer. I change nothing between the first time and the twenty fifth time. And it's maddening to have to keep trying when something should have worked the first time.

It would be understandable if Simon and his fishing partners got a little perturbed at Jesus. They had been fishing alllll night long. All night. And had gotten nothing. They'd tried it again. And again, and again and again. They knew what they were doing. It should have worked. There's no reason for it not working, except that fish are even less predictable than video projectors. They'd given up and headed back to shore. They still had to clean their nets, even though they hadn't gotten any fish.

It certainly seems like Jesus just commandeers Simon Peter's boat, pushes off from shore a little, and has a teaching session. Luke doesn't tell us what the content of the teaching was, but Peter and his crew must have heard it.

Then, in what had to be an infuriating suggestion, Jesus tells them to go out to the deep water and let down their nets. Try again. They'd just finished washing their nets, mind you. Just when you get the kitchen all cleaned up and someone appears with a dirty plate. That's the feeling. And then tells you to do the thing you've already tried 500 times without any success. Try it one more time.

At this point, Simon is way more tolerant than I think I might have been. This isn't his first encounter with Jesus, though. We skipped over chapter 4, but Simon Peter and his family have had a significant experience with Jesus already. Simon's mother in law was very sick with a fever. Jesus came to his house and rebuked the fever, and she was healed. She got up and went about her day, right then and there. This had to have made an impact on Simon, and had to be influencing how he responds to Jesus in this fishing encounter.

Where I would have been exasperated, Simon says, “Since it’s you telling me, Master, I’ll try it again.” Simon Peter shows obedience in response, I think, to that previous miracle he has witnessed. He knew what Jesus was capable of. He calls Jesus “Master,” the term that would be used for a teacher.

So he lets down the nets in the deep water and catches so many fish that the nets start to break, he has to call in reinforcements from the other boat, and then the boats are so weighed down with fish that they start to sink.

Another miracle that Simon not just sees, but benefits from and participates in.

His response to the first miracle was obedience. His response to this one is repentance: Go away from me, for I am sinful. And he calls Jesus Lord for the first time. He has a recognition, with this miracle, that Jesus is a teacher, but is far more than a teacher. Simon’s not done anything in particular that seems sinful, but he recognizes his unworthiness to have received such a miracle.

He’s amazed, his fishing partners are amazed, everyone who saw it happen was amazed. Then Jesus says to Simon “Don’t be afraid”—and that’s a command. “From now on you will be catching people”—that’s just a statement. It’s not a question or an invitation, it’s just a statement of fact. Jesus knows that Simon will follow him and catch people.

They go back to shore, and leave everything. The boats, the nets, all of those fish that could have paid their bills for the next several months and fed all of their neighbors. They—Simon and his partners—leave everything and follow Jesus.

Simon’s response to Jesus is consistently obedience. His understanding of Jesus deepens and deepens—in Simon’s understanding, Jesus moves from healer to master to lord. But as his understanding deepens, his obedience likewise deepens. Simon’s responses move from “If you say so” to “I am sinful” to leaving everything behind and following Jesus.

Through our study and spiritual traveling, we grow to understand Jesus more and more, deeper and deeper, in different ways. To be sure, that’s not a step by step process that follows an outline or a map. It’s more of a wandering, going backwards and forwards, not even knowing what’s backwards and what’s forwards. But we surely understand Jesus differently now that when we were children, than when we were younger. We surely understand Jesus differently than we did even a couple of years ago.

The question then becomes, are our responses different and deeper? If our understanding shifts, does the way we follow Jesus change too? Simon’s

responses both stay the same and deepen. He remains obedient, but he expresses that obedience in deeper and deeper and more demanding ways. Let's think about how our obedience can likewise grow deeper, in response to our deepening understanding of Jesus in our lives.