

***When God Rocked the Boat***  
**Luke 5:1-11**  
**February 7, 2010**

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**Fifth Sunday After Epiphany**

I can still remember it: It was the summer of my 5<sup>th</sup> year. We were living at 66<sup>th</sup> & Greenway Terrace in Kansas City, and Dad took the training wheels off my bike. I had been so confident until then, wheeling along the sidewalk and around our driveway. When you've got training wheels you can do anything. You can push the pavement hard, knowing there's no price to pay. The training wheels will catch you if you lean too far to the left or to the right, which probably isn't a bad philosophy of life if you believe trouble lies beyond the boundaries, at the extremes.

Out came the wrench and the screwdriver. Dad was removing my training wheels. I was thrilled he and Mom thought me ready to ride without those circular crutches. I was also scared half-to-death. What if I fall or break an arm? My older sister did just that soon after she learned to ride without training wheels. I saw her. But comes the time in everyone's life when you have to bid farewell to your blankie, your Teddy bear, your training wheels. Comes the time you have to pull anchor and push out into deep water and let down your nets. That was the summer of my 5<sup>th</sup> year. Little did I know those first pedal strokes were the start of a life-long cycling journey! That day rocked my world—though I had no idea at the time.

You have to wonder if Simon Peter and James and John had any idea Jesus had just rocked their world. He certainly rocked their boat. There they were, minding their own business, doing what they'd been doing since they were kids: fishing. Not an easy life. Late nights. Early mornings. Good fishing is for nighttime and the cool, wee hours of the morning, when the water's cold and the fish are near the surface, more apt to bite.

Fact is: they'd fished all night in Lake Galilee. Hadn't caught a thing. Exhausted and exasperated, they hung their heads. "Not much for dinner tonight. Just more of that same old, stale old bread!" Hard to face the wife & kids empty-handed! After their failure, all they wanted was to be left alone, avoid explanations, and go home and go to bed.

But, then along comes Jesus whom they'd heard of but didn't really know all that well: "Nothing to show for the night, guys?" With that, he climbed into Peter's boat. "Push this dinghy out into deeper water, and let down your nets." Peter thought him crazy. "Nobody fishes in daylight and catches anything!" But Jesus insisted. By now there was nothing to lose; or so he thought, until they all hauled in so many fish they nearly sank the boat!

But that's Jesus for you. Just when we think being a Christian is supposed to be a pleasure cruise God rocks our boat and calls us to ministry. "Help me, Jesus," we pray. "Otherwise, if it's all the same to you, leave me alone. Let me go my own way. Let me live my life as I want!"

Surely, this crossed Peter's mind lots of times after the initial excitement of dropping his nets to follow Jesus! After all, nobody tells stories like Jesus. And the miracles! My, gosh! Look at all the fish they caught in the middle of the day! Almost sank 3 boats.

Then the honeymoon was over. Days away from home turned into weeks, weeks into months. Mrs. Simon Peter was none too happy about that! Peter was supposed to be out fishing on Lake Galilee, not traipsing all over Israel "Fishing for people." Creditors were knocking at their door.

And, Peter's poor kids! Ach! At synagogue school the other kids asked where their dad was. Was he still working? "Oh, Dad doesn't do anything really," they answered. "He's just following this guy with long hair around Israel; though he does tell some amazing stories, and claims to be the messiah!" Want to know how many fights they got into?

As fantastic as the miracle of the catch of fish was in Galilee, the real miracle is that Simon got caught, along with James and John! But what they thought would be a cakewalk, turned out anything but. Eventually, the road they took to follow Jesus led all the way from far off Galilee to Jerusalem and a hill they called "The place of the skull," Golgotha. By then, Jesus had really rocked the boat of everyone from Rome to the Temple Mount. By Good Friday evening, earthquakes could be felt across the entire landscape. Jesus hadn't just rocked the boat. Jesus had rocked the whole world!

And therein lay the problem. Not that getting “hooked” by Jesus doesn’t carry a certain romance. It does! Even the peddlers of the prosperity gospel are partly right—there is joy beyond anything we’ve ever known when we follow Christ. Besides, who hasn’t felt like dropping their nets and chucking everything to follow this most amazing person who ever lived? The desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, like the gospel and the church’s mission, lies dormant in all of us.

But there’s also that often more seductive need to be in charge, to be in complete control. We want to be hooked by Christ, but we also want to be able to spit the hook out of our mouths, if it isn’t to our liking. Poet Robert Browning said a person’s “reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?”<sup>1</sup> But in all of us there’s also a desire to let our grasp exceed our reach in order to ensure that nothing and no one, including Jesus, rocks our boat and causes us to lose some kind of self-delusional control.

Many years ago my venerable 76-year old senior minister, Dr. Warner Muir, told me, “Being a Christian is one of the hardest things you can be.” Over the past few years I’ve had a growing suspicion he was right, that being a Christian is one of the toughest things God could ever call any of us to be. It makes me wonder whether we ought to just come right out and, instead of just saying to people, “Look what joy you’re missing by not being a follower of Jesus and a part of Christ’s church,” which is certainly true,

add, “Maybe you better think twice about becoming a Christian. The all glory, no guts needed,<sup>2</sup> [*sic*] Christian crowd has been fibbing to you so they can boast of their inflated numbers.” We ought to tell them, “If you get into this boat we call the church and become a Christian, God’s going to rock you and your world”

As author C.S. Lewis writes, “Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires, which you think, are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours’.”<sup>3</sup>

Lewis is right. We need to give God everything; otherwise we end up trying to split the difference between God and money, God and our own unexamined opinions and prejudices, God and fill in the blank.

Yet, we also need to know that when God calls us, God uses those talents, skills and gifts and experience God and life have given us to be of service to God’s kingdom. Jesus called Peter and James and John to use

their long-honed fishing skills to fish in a different pond: not Lake Galilee, but Israel. So God uses what we know for God's purposes.

But you know we're all afraid to do this, including yours truly. We're afraid of failure, but we're also afraid we might actually succeed. When we're young we're afraid of the past and when we're old we're afraid of the future. We're afraid of loneliness and we're afraid of intimacy. We are paralyzed by so many fears the slightest tipping of the boat throws us into a panic. Our lives are as chaotic as the deep waters Jesus commands Peter to sail out into. But just as Jesus sends Peter out into deep water, Jesus also grants us the courage to let go of the fear and take a "a leap of faith."

Though truth is: None of us is up to this thing called discipleship! None of us is up to being called to ministry where we work, play, and live. None of us is up to being a follower of Christ and all this entails. Even those who go around with a swagger in their faith are fooling nobody so much as themselves. None of us is tough enough to be a Christian. Really!

But you know something else? We don't have to be. Because when it comes to having what it takes to be a Christian, to be the church, our nets are empty; but it's God who fills them, and it's God who delivers us from the deep, from the chaos of deep waters and deep fears, and grants us peace. When we finally realize this, we can actually begin to hear Jesus call our name and say, "Follow me. Yes, you. You! Come with me."

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<sup>1</sup>*Andrea del Sarto*

<sup>2</sup>This normally reads, "No guts, no glory," but here is turned on its head.

<sup>3</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*