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Sermon Title: *Jesus Calls His Disciples*

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Jesus Calls His Disciples

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 5:1-11, as today we begin a look at some of the events and teaching of Jesus from the Gospels.

In his hometown of Nazareth, where Jesus preached in the synagogue, he was met with at first, enthusiasm, which turned to offense at his message and then became violent, murderous rage (Luke 4:14-30). In the words of Matthew, "He (Jesus) did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew 13:58). But he did do mighty works in other Galilean and Judean cities, where he cast out demons, healed many who were sick, and "kept on preaching" (Luke 4:31-44 and esp. 44). Among those who received him, he did mighty works.

Today we look at the call of Jesus to his disciples, his earliest followers, who were to continue with Jesus through the three years of his public ministry. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, we probably see the initial call that Jesus issued to these disciples (John 1:35-51). This first call perhaps was a call to "come and see" (John 1:39), when Jesus was allowing them to spend time with him and

learn about his identity as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In the setting for today’s text we hear Jesus’ call to these disciples to “come and follow,” as we see articulated in Mark’s Gospel (1:17).

Follow as I read: **Luke 5:1-11.**

Years ago, when I was serving a church in suburban Dayton, Ohio, I was asked by a neighbor, with whom I was initiating a witnessing relationship, if I would pray for his friend who was suffering from a life-threatening illness. I asked my neighbor, Steve, if his friend was a Christian and Steve replied very confidently, “Well, sure he is. He’s from Van Wert,” Steve’s hometown in Northwestern Ohio. As far as Steve knew, there were no Jews, Muslims or adherents of other world religions, and likely no atheists in Van Wert. Therefore his friend was a Christian.

The word “Christian” has lost a lot of its significance since the time it was first used to designate the followers of Jesus in the church of Antioch (Acts 11:26c). These “Christ-ones” were given this moniker because their character, behavior and mission reflected that of Jesus of Nazareth. They were similar to Christ and different from people of the world around them. But through the centuries, the name “Christian” is little more than a cultural and generically religious designation for anyone who is not a militant atheist or member of another world religion.

Perhaps a better word is “disciple,” one who is a learner and follower of Jesus. Most of us here today have heard and answered the call of Jesus to discipleship. The same principles involved in the calling of the fishermen disciples (probably, in addition to Simon Peter, there was his brother, Andrew, and James and John) apply to them and to all of us who are called Christians, and in fact claim to be disciples of Jesus.

A disciple is one who learns by following, similar to an apprentice, who learns a trade from the master-tradesman, who teaches his craft to them, that they might carry it on to the next generation. As we hear from the risen Lord, after his death, burial, resurrection and forty days of instruction before his return to heaven, we who are disciples are then to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19). Jesus calls us to be his follower-learners and he calls us to make follower-learners of others, so that the kingdom of God will grow from generation to generation. Just as in our text Jesus, the crucified, risen Lord now calls his disciples...

As he joins himself to us (verses 1-3)

One of the wonders of the gospel story is its consistent demonstration of God’s initiative in our salvation. Of course, Jesus had compassion for the multitudes, as he taught them, healed their sick and on two occasions miraculously fed them, multiplying meager rations (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-13 and parallels). And from these

multitudes he called disciples, and individuals became his followers, even if not until after his death, resurrection and ascension.

But notice also how...

Jesus comes to us when we are not looking for him

We always see Jesus consistently portrayed as singling out and caring for individuals, as he does these fishermen turned disciples. As our text says, although surrounded by the multitude, Jesus saw the two boats, and then he got into one of them (verse 3). This is vividly portrayed in our text, as we see Jesus joining himself to specific individuals. Jesus had already invited them to come and spend time with him (John 1:39) and now he gets into their fishing boat with them in order to lead them into a deeper understanding of and stronger relationship with him (verse 3). Jesus Christ came into the world in order to save sinners and he comes to us often...

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the Gentiles as a people who would be saved even though they were not looking for God:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name,
I said, ‘Here am I, here am I’” (Isaiah 65:1).

Jesus came to these fishermen who were preoccupied with their business, which at times was profitable yet at times, as in our text, unsuccessful. But fishermen were not and probably still are not the most likely to be religious seekers.

When Nancy and I were in the Holy Land, I was involved in the filming of a television special on the life of Jesus, and one stop for us was the Jordan River, where it flows out of Lake Galilee. Here I was to offer a segment on Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer. Just as we were getting ready for the filming, a group of young fishermen appeared, bringing their boat to shore with a successful catch of fish. As they unloaded the fish from the boat into the back of their truck, it was apparent how like the first followers of Jesus were these rough-hewn young fishermen. I imagined that anything except religion, deep philosophy or spirituality was on their minds and in their raucous chatter. I couldn't understand them, but there might have even been a sprinkling of profanity in their talk.

Jesus often chooses the most unlikely, as Paul says, in order to show his grace and also his great power to transform people into the likeness of his Son (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). As Paul told Timothy, he had been a blasphemer, persecutor and a violent man, but God changed him dramatically in order to put his mercy and grace on display (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you,” said our Lord (John 15:16a). Jesus sought all of us redeemed people, not because of our deserving or our spiritual inclinations, but because of his mercy and to demonstrate in our lives his power to save. Jesus had a reputation of being a “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34). Those who had no religious claims and who realized they were lost sinners were the ones Jesus most attracted and called to follow him. In his parable about the lost sheep, Jesus spoke of the greater “rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:1-7).

And also...

Jesus comes to us at the right time

The Good News is that God loved us, sinners though we are. And when Jesus came to these fishermen, they were in need of him. And those of us here today who now follow him are all in desperate need for Jesus. And this is why he came to rescue us.

And if we believe his testimony and that of the Apostle Paul and Evangelist Luke, he had eternally chosen us before we chose him and sovereign God had, even prior to our knowledge of the gospel, appointed us for eternal life (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 13:48). And in his perfect timing, whether in full adulthood or childhood, the time was right for Jesus to come to us and claim us as his own. And this was the way Jesus came into the world on his rescue mission. As Paul says, “...when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son...that he might redeem,” rescue us from our lost condition (Galatians 4:4).

Our disobedience to God’s laws and our rebellious independence from him had separated us from his love. We could do nothing to make ourselves right with God. In fact, we were not inclined to, but rather were running away from God as fast as possible. But God loved us enough to send his only Son to die on the cross for us. He suffered the punishment and died the death we all deserve to suffer. He was our substitute. And by turning from our sin and trusting that Jesus, now risen from the grave and alive in heaven, will save us, we follow him in a life of obedience—not perfection, but purposeful obedience.

As Jesus said, following his successful rescue of sinner Zacchaeus, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). And he sought each one of us who claim to be his followers. He came to us at the perfect time, when an event or perhaps a friend, opened our eyes and piqued our interest in him. We may have even come to sense our desperate need for him.

It was therefore not just coincidence that Jesus got into one of the fishing boats. Of course, there was a practical reason. The crowd was so large that Jesus was crowded to the edge of the water, and as Peterson paraphrases it, Jesus used

the boat for a pulpit (*The Message*, verse 3). But he chose the boat of Peter and his fishing business partners in order to join them saving-ly to himself. I believe God's word clearly shows the particular choice and love of God for us as individuals. God loves you so much, that if you were the only person alive, and you were in need of redeeming grace, Christ Jesus would die just for you.

Jesus calls his disciples as he joins himself to us and...

As he shows his greatness to us (verses 4-7)

In verses 4-7 we see Jesus' revealing his greatness to these fishermen whom he would call to be his follower-learners. Jesus was setting the stage for his miracle of the great catch of fish. In his gospel account, John uses the word for "sign" for the miracles of Jesus. John knew that Jesus' mighty works were not only to meet immediate needs, but also were for the purpose of disclosing his nature and significance. For example, when Jesus miraculously multiplied the five loaves and two fish to feed the 5,000, he was not only alleviating the physical hunger of the crowd. He was also revealing himself as the eternal Bread of Life, who alone can give us the eternally sustaining and satisfying life of God (John 6:1-15; 25-59).

We are not prepared to follow Jesus as his disciples until we have seen his greatness and this he does as...

He gives his word to us

The call of the Lord Jesus to us always begins with his word that comes to us. Jesus spoke his word to Simon Peter and now he speaks his word to us through Scripture, as it comes to us through reading and preaching and always as empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit, who makes the word deeply personal to us individually.

When Jesus finished his sermon, he had a personal word for Simon Peter. And that's how God works in our lives, personally and directly, as though we were the only ones in the audience that hear the sermon. Jesus told Simon Peter push the boat back into the deep water and throw out the fishing nets to catch fish.

It's difficult for us to appreciate the apparent senselessness of this command. Jesus was by his trade in Joseph's household a carpenter and, as far as we know, had never fished in his life. On the other hand, Peter and his business partners, Andrew, James and John, were professional fishermen. The night before, they had fished all night under the best of natural conditions most conducive to catching fish, and they had caught nothing. In addition, the daytime was inimical to fishing because the large nets could be seen by fish in the daylight waters. (See Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, page 232). And

so Simon Peter replies, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything” (verse 5a).

When the word of God first comes to you, there may be a lot of troubling, unanswered questions in your mind. You are perhaps unfamiliar with the gospel. You have questions about God and the nature of his Son, Jesus. You cannot understand how Jesus’ suffering and death could satisfy God’s demands for justice and how that Jesus can be your substitute, suffering what you and I deserve to suffer. You cannot comprehend the reality of the resurrection, how that Jesus could have been dead for three days and then raised to new life in his resurrection body. You cannot understand how he now reigns in the heavenly realms, which are as real as this earthly realm and far more stable and permanent. Nor can you comprehend how that God would love you so much as to rescue you from your sins and that by faith in him all of your sin and guilt will be removed.

Whenever God’s word comes to us we are faced with a crisis of faith.

And as we obey him...

Jesus shows his greatness. But first we must obey him. But just as Jesus gave a command to Peter to cast his net into the water, so he commands you to repent, turn from sin and self, and believe in him and follow him, leaving all of your doubts and questions for him to resolve for you. Faith is obeying God’s word, regardless of the evidence and sometimes in spite of the evidence. Faith is not irrational but it is supra rational. Salvation comes to those willing to trust the evidence God gives us and to do what he says before the confirmation. We don’t try to understand in order to believe; rather, we believe in order to understand. When we take God at his word and do what he says, our minds are opened to understand and God gives us all the confirmation we need. In fact, only after we become God’s children, now given his Spirit to live in us, does his word and his world begin to make sense to us.

And this is only the beginning. Even after we have been follower-learners of Jesus for years, his word continues to come to us to challenge us in the next step of faith. I’m discovering that life’s challenges don’t stop with advancing age. I’m facing my greatest tests so far, and you will also face many more challenges to your faith as Jesus will continue to call you to follow him in new ways and into different places. The Christian life is one of following Jesus day by day in simple obedience. Salvation is not a commodity you keep, like an eternal life insurance policy that guarantees you a place in heaven, regardless of how you live now. Our only assurance of salvation is in our relationship with Jesus, which is based on our trust in his promises and our consequent obedience to his word. And when we cease obeying, we forfeit the assurance of our salvation, which is the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit day by day (John 15:1-17; Matthew 7:15-23; 2 Peter 1:3-11).

I cannot tell you what Jesus will command you during your pilgrimage. And what he asks may seem nonsensical to you, like net fishing in broad daylight. We are creatures of time and space and are conditioned to think practically. Even as Christians, followers of Jesus, it may seem absurd to us when Jesus commands us to sell our business practice and enter a church-related vocation, move to a foreign country and learn a new language and culture. He is leading this church through some deep waters of testing, and you're being challenged to trust him even though many got "out of the boat"! God's word may command this church and you personally to undertake an endeavor that seems risky and will draw the criticism of family, friends and business associates. The word and the will of God can seem unpractical and even absurd. What Jesus expects is our obedience.

Notice the reply of Simon Peter: "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (verse 5).

This is the essence of faith. It's when we don't understand yet still obey. Notice, Peter called Jesus "Master." You cannot say "Master" and "no" in the same sentence. (I'm reminded how Simon Peter, in response to the vision he received to eat unclean animals as an "object lesson" for universality of the gospel, clearly demurred, saying "Surely not, Lord!" [Acts 10:14]). We obey and follow simply because he is Master and he says so.

Yet, when he gives his word and we obey him...

He reveals his glory to us

When Simon Peter and his colleagues obeyed, they "caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." And with all their partners they filled two boats "so full that they began to sink" (verses 6-7). And these were not little rowboats, but were between 20 and 30 feet long. (When by Lake Galilee, Nancy and I saw a typical first century fishing boat of this approximate size that had been recently recovered from the bottom of the lake. See S Wachsman, article 14.5, 1988, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "The Galilee Boat—2,000-Year-Old Hull Recovered Intact").

God responded to the obedience of Simon Peter by revealing his power and his glory. The promise of God is the revealing of himself as a glorious Savior to all who will believe. He will show himself strong in the life of everyone who trusts and obeys. When you open your heart to him and trust him and begin to walk with him, he will reveal his power to forgive your sins and remove your guilt and shame for your past life and mistakes. The glory of salvation is that he will forgive your sins and remove them forever from you (Psalm 103:3,12). And he gives the glory of his presence in our lives and the free gift of eternal and abundant life, both now and for a glorious eternity in heaven.

His glory continues to be made known as he works in our lives. We learn to live daily in the wonder and mystery of his resurrection presence. We see the footprints of Jesus in our daily lives, even in the most unlikely places. And we see his glory and power made known among his people as we worship and as we pray and allow him to work through us and through his unified people, his church. When we obey him and follow his directives, we are joining him in his kingdom work. And the work he does as the risen Lord through his Spirit-filled church is a greater work than he did in his earthly public ministry (John 14:12).

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, quoting Isaiah 64:4).

God’s desire is to show his greatness to his people. Indeed, the purpose of God is to glorify himself. We were created to worship him and to add to his glory as creator and also as our Deliverer. God’s desire is to turn our attention to him. Only when we focus on God and his glory do we find our greatest joy because this is the reason we were created.

As with Simon Peter and these fishermen, Jesus calls his disciples as he joins himself to us, shows us his greatness and...

As he prepares and leads us (verses 8-11)

In verses 8-11 we see the results that Jesus had in mind for this sign miracle of the great catch of fish. His purpose was to set the stage, as it were, for the commissioning and leading of Peter and the other disciples to follow and serve with him. Jesus prepared Simon Peter, as he would prepare us...

To worship him

As a result of Jesus’ demonstration of his power, Peter “fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” (verse 8). This is a typical response to a theophany, a “God-appearing.”

When Isaiah saw the glorious appearing of the Lord in the temple, he cried, “Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5).

And Simon Peter felt the same sense of sinfulness and unworthiness before the presence of the Lord. When he said, “Go away from me, Lord,” Peter was not wanting Jesus to leave him, but was stating how unworthy he was of the Lord and that he had no claim upon his mercy (See Joel Green, above citation, page

233). *The Message* paraphrases Peter's expression of his unworthiness as "I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself."

We are not prepared to follow Jesus until we become worshipers. In fact, the very act of following Jesus is to be an act of self-giving worship and is for the purpose of leading others to worship him (John 4:23). Worshiping the majesty of God, not just in corporate worship, but in our daily listening prayer and in our practicing the presence of the risen Jesus throughout our daily life, is our life calling as his followers. This worship of the risen Jesus is the source of our joy and strength and is the way we please God and find our greatest pleasure in life.

In a letter written in behalf of the persecuted church several years ago, the closing lines were a quote from CS Lewis:

"I was not born to be free.
I was born to worship, to obey and to praise God!"

(See www.christians.co.za)

God blesses and uses those who have humbled themselves under his mighty hand in a spirit of worship. As Eugene H Peterson states so forcefully in his new book, *Living the Resurrection* (IVP), if we but realized and lived in the wonder of the presence of Jesus, we would have the proper perspective on all of life. This is why we have the Sabbath rest—to regain our focus on the reality and presence of the risen Jesus, which we are to experience in our daily workaday worlds. We need also to restore the wonder and proper fear of the Lord that was experienced by the disciples who witnessed this miracle of the catch of fish (verse 9) and Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter Sunday (Luke 24:37, 41). The presence of Jesus is the antidote to the idolatrous tendencies of our hearts and the awareness of his presence is the source of our joy, peace and power.

The problem in many of our churches is our tendency to get new Christians involved in church work and activities before we lead them to become worshipers. You newer disciples, never get involved in your vocation or even in your church activities without giving the priority of your time to worship, both corporate with God's people and in your listening prayer and practicing of God's presence. And God intends for you to worship his risen presence even while you sit at your office desk or take your position in the workplace or school. When you begin to work and even to do church work and live your daily life and fulfill your marriage and family obligations without worship, you will find yourself disappointed, dissatisfied and quickly disillusioned. Making a new believer the church treasurer, even though she may be a brilliant accountant, before she learns to worship, is a certain road to spiritual disaster.

When the crucified, risen Lord Jesus is the focus of our hearts in praise and worship, then we are able...

To follow him

In the context of worship, Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him” (verses 10-11). This was a decisive commitment: “From now on”! There would be no turning back.

No doubt this seemed unreasonable, just like fishing in broad daylight after a night of futility seemed unreasonable. This call to these fishermen came at a moment of great sacrifice. Their business had been profitable, and now, with Jesus “calling the shots,” they could succeed in the fishing business as never before. And the call to leave their boats and nets on the shore and follow Jesus had “obvious economic, vocational and social ramifications” (Joel Green, above citation, page 235).

The grace by which we are saved is absolutely free, but to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it is not cheap (See *The Cost of Discipleship*). To accept Jesus’ free grace and pardon from our sin demands that now we respond in loving obedience and follow him as our Lord and Master, wherever he might lead us. His calling now and years later may seem to us illogical, untimely and unwelcome. Yet this is the path of true spiritual worship, the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices and the daily proving of the blessedness of doing his perfect will (Romans 12:1-2). As I mentioned earlier, Jesus may call you to leave your vocation and familiar surroundings, or he may call you to remain right where you are, persevering in the midst of difficulties and dry periods.

Yet, wherever he calls us to follow, he calls us to the cruciform life, of sharing his sufferings and saying “no” to self interests and the lure of the fallen world and its idols and lower values. For us to follow Jesus means that we allow him to live in us and his life again as us, allowing us to be identified with him. That means we will suffer rejection, misunderstanding, ridicule or worse (Luke 12:1-12; 49-53; 14:25-33; John 15:18-16:4; 2 Timothy 3:12). But because we follow the risen Jesus in an attitude of prayer and worship, the way will be filled with joy.

And our purpose will be...

To bring others to him

As we see, when Jesus called these disciples, he said they would transition from catching fish to people (verse 10). As Mark’s gospel records, Jesus said, “Come, follow me...and I will make you fishers of men” (1:17). There is a corollary here. Although we don’t all have the gift of evangelist as listed in Ephesians 4:11, we nevertheless are all called to witness by life and word in such a way that others will be drawn to faith in Christ.

In a former church I served in the USA, we had an evangelism training program designed to enlist and involve laymen in sharing their faith in Christ effectively, in order to lead the unconverted to faith in Jesus. We asked a layman to share his testimony about his decision to receive the personal evangelism training. And Van, a successful young businessman, said that when he heard Jesus' words, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of me," he realized that if he was not fishing he could not be sure he was following.

There is a necessary correlation between following Jesus in obedient discipleship and sharing Jesus with others, wining them to become worshipers and follower-learners. The Great Commission is for all of us. We are to go into our "nations," "ethne," our own people group and sphere of influence, in order to influence acquaintances, precious friends and family members to follow Jesus.

What he asks for is a heart to lead others into the kingdom. And in this life on earth we may not be privileged to see a great haul of "fish," that is, lives that come to Christ through our witness. But if we are faithful, God will be faithful to use the life we live and the words we share intentionally to lead others to himself. I read the words of an ancient church father, Maximus of Turin, who noted that in the church's evangelism and witnessing, we do not fish successfully because of our gear, but because of God's grace (page 88, NT vol. III, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*). And we do not "go it alone." Fishing required teamwork, manning the boats, lowering the nets, hauling in the catch. And so the church is a team of disciples, who encourage, pray for and assist one another in the work of bringing others to Christ.

Conclusion:

Most of us here today have answered the call of Jesus to be his followers. We must continue to follow him in a life of worship and obedience that results in others coming to Christ because of our new missional life in him. And we will ask that Jesus continue to lead us as we continue on and face future crises of faith and opportunities to prove our love by demonstrating our obedience.

But perhaps others of you right now are in a crisis of faith. The Lord Jesus is calling you to follow him, maybe for the first time. You have some unanswered questions. But you will never have complete understanding until you say to Jesus, "But because you say so, Master, I will believe and follow you."

Others of us may be in another crisis of faith, perhaps a vocational one. And it seems nonsensical to you that Jesus would call you to leave a career or business practice that is going so well. Or perhaps he calls you, as he did the newly delivered Gerasene demoniac, to stay at home, to remain in the same place that has for you become a challenge and an unwelcome place (Luke 8:26-39). So, obedience for you is to remain steadfast and to find your adventure and

joy in your walk with Jesus. But it doesn't make sense. You have always been willing to venture out for Jesus, but he says to you, "stay." And so your answer also must be, "But because you say so, Master."

May we all today answer the call of Jesus to follow him!

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Why do you think that Jesus selected these fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James and John) to be his followers? And why do you think he called you to follow him?
2. Why do you think Jesus was called "a friend of sinners" (Luke 7:34)? Was this meant to be a compliment to Jesus? Why or why not is it a compliment? Would you want to be known as "a friend of sinners?" Why or why not?
3. Jesus' command to put out into the deep and let down their fishing nets seemed unreasonable to these professional fishermen. What has Jesus called or asked you to do that has seemed illogical or unreasonable?
4. Simon Peter obeyed because Jesus commanded them. When have you obeyed an unreasonable call of God? When have you disobeyed when Jesus called?
5. What were the results of the obedience of these fishermen? What were the results (or are the continuing results) of your obedience?
6. Peter worshipped Jesus when he saw his glory and power. What part does worship have in your life? Why is worship (corporate and personal) essential to following Jesus?
7. Do you see that in order to follow Jesus you must also seek to "fish for people" (verse 10 and Mark 1:17)? Read Matthew 28:19-20 and answer, "Why is sharing Christ with others an essential part of following Jesus?"

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