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Luke 5:1-11
The Mission of the Messiah in Luke
“Called to Follow”

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Today we continue the series we’ve been in for a couple previous Sundays, and continuing through the end of October, focusing on the Mission of Jesus. So, who was he and what was his purpose? And what does that mean for us today? These are the kinds of questions we’re answering in this series. If you’re someone who doesn’t know all that much about Jesus, or if you’ve only gone by what you’ve heard second-hand, or just casually here and there, this is a great series to stick with to see what Jesus is really all about. **The Gospels are among the most reliable and best-attested ancient sources we have for any figure of antiquity. And in this series we’ll be in the one that we know as the Gospel According to Luke, who states at the outset that he “investigated everything carefully from the beginning.”**

For those of us who are already followers of Jesus, I pray this series will comfort us where we need comforting, but particularly will challenge us where we need some encouragement to (as D.C. Talk put it in a song 30 years ago) see Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly on a day by day basis.¹ It’s been said that a good sermon should comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. I hope this whole series lives up to that.

So, just to very briefly recap the last couple weeks: two Sundays ago we started with a look at Jesus’ identity as revealed in Luke 3 and Luke 4, that Jesus is the Son of God. Out of that identity then comes his mission that we looked at last week, where he is the guest teacher in the synagogue he grew up in. He reads a prophetic passage from Isaiah about one who would come and be anointed to proclaim fulfillment, freedom, healing, and the favor of God. And Jesus’ teaching there in Luke 4 on that Isaiah passage is that “today, this is fulfilled in your hearing.” And so: **This is Jesus’ mission: to proclaim and even embody fulfillment, freedom, healing, and the favor of God here and now, today.**

With that mission declared, Jesus’ next step is to lay the groundwork for accomplishing that mission. He starts by inviting others to join with him on

that mission, and that's what we see today. So, we are in Luke 5, beginning in verse 1. We'll read the **first three verses** to start with, and then continue reading beyond that in a couple minutes.

So, Luke is setting the scene here for us. People are crowding around and pressing in to Jesus, listening to the word of God...listening to Jesus teach. **Like all of Jesus' teaching, this teaching would have been rooted in what you and I call the Old Testament, what they would call the Scriptures.** And the people are eager to hear what Jesus says – they're pressing in on him and listening. If this were in church, the front rows of seats would have been filled up as everyone pressed forward. They're pressing in, probably even making it a little awkward for Jesus to speak to all of them.

Have you ever been to an elementary school play, or something similar, where the actors don't have microphones? Kids especially will speak loud enough that the people in the first row or two can hear, but if you're 10 or 12 rows back, it's really hard to hear them. Even after rehearsing, they don't understand that you have to speak louder than you think you do, so the whole audience can hear. Jesus understands this, so he undoubtedly spoke loudly enough that people at the back could hear him, but because they're pressing in, and the closest people are probably just a few feet away, the people in the front row are practically going deaf because of the volume.

This is why he gets in the fishing boat, and as we'll see in a moment, Simon and his fishing buddies get in with him to row it out and keep it oriented so Jesus can face the audience. By gaining a little bit of space, it actually evens out the distance between him and the people of the crowd. We might think it odd that he sat down to teach (could be just because it's the safe thing to do in a boat, especially if there are waves), but sitting was the typical posture of a rabbi in their day. It seems odd to us, but it was normal to them.

By the way, and the archaeologists and historians in the room will appreciate this, so maybe it's like 2 of you...but in 1986, a boat that dates to the first century A.D – exactly when Jesus walked the face of the earth – was discovered on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee during an extreme

drought that lowered the water level and exposed the boat (**Photo**). It's sometimes called the "Jesus Boat."



That's not to say that it actually is the boat Jesus taught from, of course; but it is almost certainly very similar to, if not exactly the same as, the boat Jesus used here in Luke and the other boats mentioned in the Gospels. And this boat is 27 feet long, almost 8 feet wide and about 4 feet deep; it's made of cedar and oak planks, with obvious repairs made to it over time. Scholars believe it would have been rowed and steered by 4-5 people, probably had a mast for a sail as well, and had enough room for as many as 15 people total. This is the kind of boat Jesus taught from here in this passage. Ok, let's keep reading (**verses 4-7**)...

So now **Jesus takes off his "rabbi hat" and puts on his "fishing guide hat."** His advice is resisted at first. And can you blame them? Jesus did not grow up as a fisherman. Scripture tells us he had been a carpenter, though actually he probably worked more with stone and rock, maybe even metal, rather than primarily with wood. "Craftsman" is probably a better way to think of Jesus' work that he did for a few years before his public ministry.²

The point is, Jesus is not going to be viewed by them as the fishing expert here. It's like a kid with his driver's permit telling mom and dad how to drive. Peter and the gang are the professionals and know what they're doing, and question Jesus' advice. They've worked hard and been fishing "all night" as Simon Peter says, and they haven't caught a single fish. Now, this is not Simon Peter's first encounter with Jesus, though he's not a "disciple" yet at this moment. His first encounter happened earlier in Luke. And in Luke 4:38-39, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law from an illness. So, he knows Jesus some, has witnessed a miracle, and has maybe heard him teach previously as well. And he decides to at least take a chance on Jesus' suggestion.

The nets are thrown back out into the water. And they catch such a large haul of fish that their nets are breaking and they need to call in reinforcements to help out. Let's finish out the rest of the passage (**verses 8-11**).

Peter's response might seem odd to us – telling Jesus to go away, and confessing that he's a sinful man. But notice that Peter calls him "Lord" here,

whereas earlier he'd called him "master." "Master" was certainly a respectful title; but "Lord" is more exalted, and it shows recognition of divine presence. **And: Throughout Scripture when God's presence is with people in this very tangible kind of way, they tend to distance themselves from God because although they're created in the image of God, they are sinful in nature. They recognize they can't and shouldn't be in the presence of the divine.**

For instance, in Exodus, Moses didn't want to approach the burning bush or even look at it, because of God's presence there; When Isaiah has a vision where he sees God – not even a physical sense of God's presence – Isaiah responds with these words: "Woe is me! I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips...for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). There are numerous other encounters as well where people distance themselves from the presence of the divine. Peter's response here is the same. He recognizes the holy and divine nature of Jesus, and it freaks him out because Peter is anything but holy or divine.

And so, Jesus responds: "Don't be afraid." This the most frequent command in Scripture. And Jesus then invites Peter (sort of tells him more than inviting, really) to join him on his mission, using fishing language to do so: "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." And we're told that Simon Peter, along with his partners James and John, they leave everything and follow Jesus.

So, this is how Luke describes the beginning of Jesus' team coming together around him that would join him on his mission of proclaiming fulfillment, freedom, healing and the favor of God. And although, obviously, this all happened 2,000 years ago, people are still following Jesus and carrying out his mission. It's kind of stunning, really. Jesus was not in a powerful family, his initial disciples are mostly salt of the earth kinds of guys – maybe even a bit rough around the edges. But Jesus models for us that this mission he's on is not something he wants to accomplish on his own. He invites others to join him.

So, there are four things connected to being part of Jesus' team that I want to close with as application points for us today. Maybe one or two will resonate with you. As we look at Peter and his companions casting out the fishing net against all their better judgment: **First: We see that God calls us to trust Jesus and his word, even when it contradicts our instincts or experiences.** We might think we know best; we might have an intuition or inclination that is different than what God says to us through his word; we might want to do life our own way...but Jesus calls us to trust him and his word. Sometimes that's challenging. It cuts against our pride and our prejudices and our feelings and who knows what all else...but when Jesus is "Lord" as Peter calls him here, then we follow what he says, even if it's not natural for us, or feels risky.

Second: We want to acknowledge the holiness of Jesus, and the sinfulness of ourselves. In that moment there in the boat, Peter recognized these two things. And it's important for us to recognize this as well. In John's biography of Jesus there's an instance where some men wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery. Jesus says to them, "Whoever of you is without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone." They all walked away without throwing anything. To the woman he told her, "See, no one has condemned you. Neither do I. Now, go and leave your life of sin." (See John 8:1-11.) The men and the woman had sin in their lives. We all do. Paul writes that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We might not like the word "sin". We might think everyone else's sin is worse than our own rather than simply looking in the mirror. But Peter recognized his own sin, and he recognized the divine presence of God in Jesus: So, he fell down on his knees before him, and then followed Jesus when invited to do so. He sets the example for us to follow.

Third, as Jesus does with the guys here and so many others throughout the New Testament: Jesus invites you to follow him and be on mission with him – but it will cost you something. So many people who follow Jesus struggle with this – starting with me. I want my own way. I want life to be filled with fulfilling my own desires and following my own ideas and living how I want to and with all my "stuff" – physical stuff, emotional stuff,

experiential stuff. Like Peter and the gang here: What might you need to let go of or leave behind in order to follow Jesus and be on mission for him?

Fourth, we see that: as we follow Jesus, we do so in community. The theme for today's Back to Church Sunday is "Better Together." And that is so true. Life in general, and a life of faith, is better in community, it's better when it's done with other people. In fact, it's how God has designed us, and how God works. It's always in community, from the Old Testament to the New – whether a nation or a tribe or a handful of disciples. Jesus' invitation is to join with the community that is on mission with him. In his book, *Life Together* Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, **"Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the Church, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you"** (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*).

In other words: we need others in life, and as we follow Jesus on mission with him. You're not meant to do this alone. We need community where we can be vulnerable and open with our fears and our thoughts and the things that worry us so others can help shoulder them with us, and pray for us, and walk with us through life and grow as disciples of Jesus.

And of course there are lots of places where you can find community; there will be 65,000 fans at the Seahawks game today, our places of work and education provide community. Our neighborhoods can do this. Those are great places to bring your faith and be on mission. But only the community that Jesus offers is rooted in the one who made you in his image. Only the community that Jesus calls you to gives you an eternal mission. Only the community that Jesus offers will continue on the other side of the grave. **You are an image bearer of God, and Jesus invites you into his community to do life, and be on mission, with others.** It will cost you something. It'll mean confessing sin and acknowledging him as Lord. It might all be counterintuitive: Like when Jesus told Peter to try fishing again, out in deeper water, you might think that following Jesus is a crazy idea. But is it

worth it? In a word, as my own personal testimony: Absolutely. And life with Jesus is better together with others. So be part of his community, his team, and be blessed beyond measure. We are called to follow him with others. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Thank you D.C. Talk for the last half of that line right there, from their song, "Day By Day."

² Really good article on this topic here: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2021/11/jewish-construction-worker-jesus-vocation-profession-stone/>