

## Goin' Fishin'

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#), [Luke 5:1-11](#)

I wonder if any of you have heard any fishing or 'fish' stories. Do you know the ones I mean? They usually start with, "I once caught a fish, this big!" No matter how ridiculous the story or how big the supposed fish that got away was, we are completely intrigued. We are literally swept up in the story. Maybe we even remember our own fish stories and begin to share back and forth. Here is mine: I was about 8 and my dad took my sister, brother and I out to fish along the shoreline near Nicodemus Bridge. My dad was showing my sister how to cast and I was watching intently. My sister was pretty good right off the bat so of course I wanted to outdo her. My dad forgot one simple thing – I am left-handed. He stood on my left side as he went through the same instruction for me to follow. I reeled back, swung my arm forward and released the line and hook just

at the right time to hook my dad right in the middle of his back. Luckily he was wearing a jacket so I didn't do any permanent damage but let's just say my dad didn't stand close to me for the rest of the trip!

Today's gospel lesson sounds like a true fish story. It has all the elements. The big difference is that in a classic fish story, it's always about the one that got away. This story is about the account where the catch was overflowing. Picture the scene if you can. It's probably early morning with a little mist hovering over the lake. The lake itself is calm and dark and serene. The shore is sandy and warm, and you can hear the gentle lapping of the water against the two boats that are moored there. I have heard hunters describe this time of morning and I suppose fishers would share the same feeling – it's the perfect time of day.

The difficulties of being a fisher in Jesus' time were numerous. First, the land was under Roman occupation. There was increasing demand to bring in a bigger and bigger catch in order to meet the levies required while still having enough to feed your family. Second, there were many fishermen in the area trying to do the same thing so supply might be getting a little tight. Third, often the work environment was treacherous and the local men would often have to fish throughout the night just to track down a good school of fish. Fishing was not the enjoyable pastime that it is for most of us – it was hard work.

So here we find Jesus on the shore. Clearly he was familiar with the area having grown up nearby. It seems the lake was a familiar gathering place. So Jesus is on the shore of the sea being pressed upon by the crowd – they were hungry for the word of God. They wanted to hear Jesus' teachings and were

desperate for some good news in their lives. So Jesus gets an idea and flags down Simon to take him out a little ways from the shore so he can teach the crowd and be better heard by all. I can picture Simon as being fairly exhausted and concerned. He had been out fishing all night and had not caught a thing. How was he going to supply the Roman government? How was he going to feed his family?

But at the same time I can hear Jesus' words of assurance and compassion – 'my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' 'Drink from this water and you will never thirst again.' 'I am the bread of life.' Simon was hearing all of this in light of his current concerns for his life and his family. It seems at some point he may have seen some kind of light through his personal darkness.

But while Jesus was meeting the spiritual needs of those he came in contact with, he did not neglect their physical needs. People were suffering all around him. He understood what it meant to live in oppression having grown up in this Roman occupied territory. Jesus got it. He understood. I think he also knew that Simon would need a bit of a nudge to help him take his first step of faith and become a disciple. So Jesus tells Simon to go out into deeper water – come away from what is familiar and certain to what is unfamiliar. Jesus says to put out into deep water and ‘cast your nets on the other side.’

Why? Why would Jesus tell Simon to cast his nets on the other side? Surely there were other fishermen out all night that had fished from that side. James and John had also been out fishing all night – I can’t imagine they would have just all stuck to one side or one area. They were all desperate to catch fish. I

am guessing they combed the area as much as possible. And Simon tells Jesus this – “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.” I think we too try to set God straight when we are told to do something. We feel the need to explain things to God because clearly God doesn’t get it. Simon did this too – just in case Jesus wasn’t aware that they had been out all night and hadn’t caught a thing. But Jesus knew – he also knew that when they would cast their nets on the other side this time, their results would be vastly different.

So Simon continues, “Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” Of course you know the rest of the story. There were so many fish that Simon had to call his partners in the other boat to come help and still they nearly sank because of the multitude of fish in the nets. I am sure that was an eye-opening experience for the fishermen as well as the crowd. Simon immediately

recognized his own unworthiness at being in the presence of Jesus, just as Isaiah did from our Old Testament reading. When God calls us, often our first response is something like, “You have got the wrong person!” Then Jesus reassures Simon just as the seraph had reassured Isaiah – “Do not be afraid.” To this call, Isaiah firmly stated, “Here I am Lord, send me.” Simon replied with action, along with James and John, by dropping everything and following Jesus.

I often wondered about Simon (later called Peter), but I wondered more about his family. Simon was obviously the head of his household and responsible for providing for his family. Yet he left everything to follow Jesus. How did his family survive? I wondered about my own family as I answered the call to ministry. How would we survive? Not too many people go into the ministry for the money! I had a high-paying job

taken away so I knew we could adapt as we had in the past, but there was a different dimension to this calling. Jesus never promised a burden-free life. He said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” It can be a struggle to follow God’s calling, yet very rewarding at the same time. I never felt as settled and clear about my job in the secular world as I do about my calling to ministry.

So I ask you, is God calling you today? Are you feeling the pull of ministry in some way? As we talked about spiritual gifts a while back it is clear that not everyone is called to be a preacher, yet we are all called. What is it that God is calling you to do here at Mount Tabor? What is it that God is calling you to do here in this community? What is it that God is calling you to do for the greater community outside our area?

The time of Lent is quickly approaching. Today is communion Sunday. Perhaps during this time you can search your heart and listen for God's call in your life. We have many ministries that we are launching to better reach out to others. Are there ways you can help with these ministries? Can you be the one to answer, "Here I am Lord, send me." May God continue to bless us as a community of faith in this area, spreading the good news to all our neighbors both far and near. Amen.