

Luke 5:1-11

Epiphany 5, February 6, 2022
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On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Hang Upon the Word of Jesus

- I. Listen to it
- II. Depend upon it

As I try to visualize the scene at the lake on that day in our text, I picture a group of small children gathered around the TV screen. Maybe that doesn't happen as much anymore, what with TV's growing to the size that they are today, but I'm sure you can picture that scene. Back when TV's were smaller, the children would sit up close to watch a movie; one child would get excited and leap up into a standing position. Other kids suddenly can't see very well, so they also stand up to move closer, and like some sort of reverse dominoes, they're standing up and "pressing in" on the TV so as not to miss anything.

I think the crowd at the lake that day must have looked like that. In verse 1, we're told, "**On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God.**" That crowd couldn't get close enough. And there were no miracles being done that day, no, these people were there **Hanging Upon the Word of Jesus**. They were pressing in because they wanted to hear what He had to say, and they didn't want to miss a word.

And we see quite a different scene just a few feet away as four fishermen clean their nets after a failed night on the Sea of Galilee. You know their names: Peter and Andrew, James and John—four fishing partners who we now know as Jesus' disciples, but at this point they were followers of Jesus in a more informal way. Jesus had already invited these specific men to follow Him, but it wasn't in the capacity that it would be soon. So, on this occasion, it doesn't seem likely that they were listening very closely at all. They're working, they're tired, they had a frustrating night trying to make a living and coming up empty handed—I'm sure they really just wanted to go get some rest and didn't want to get caught up in this crowd.

Clearly, that's what Jesus thinks would be most important for them. Instead, Jesus knew that these men needed to stay and hear the Word, and He wanted the people to hear better as well. So, Jesus made use of the lake, pushing out into it with these four fishermen, creating a natural amphitheater so that everyone could hear His Words of life.

So on that day, God's Words came from a boat; today those words come from a pulpit, and we can find them written on the pages of Scripture. And as God's Words of life are issuing forth, are we like children pressing in close so that we don't miss a thing? Are we **Hanging Upon the Words of Jesus** and really **Listening to it**? Or are we hanging upon everything else instead? We are often like children excitedly gathering around, but it's not usually around God's Word. Occasionally, maybe, but perhaps more often we press in excitedly on our plans for later in the day, or what we're doing for lunch, or our favorite new show on Netflix, we hang upon what is going on at work. The effect is that when Jesus' words are being spoken, we might look more like those disciples working at something else, so that perhaps these Words of life are in one ear and out the other.

What if instead we actually did gather, like Children pressing in, so that we can hear the Word of Jesus. What if we excitedly hung upon every word? What if we carried Jesus' Word with us throughout the week? What if we meditated on it and carried it in our hearts? What if God's Word was not just a Sunday thing but a *life* thing for us? And what if when God's Word was being spoken, we not only heard it, but we actually *listened* to it, and applied it to our lives, and obeyed it? Even those times when we're frustrated and tired and things just haven't gone our way, what if especially then we listened to what our Savior had to say?

That's where the disciples find themselves. Finally on shore after a long night of fishing, and now Jesus is asking them to keep working, to go back out again. Finishing his sermon, He then turns to Simon and says, **"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."** Now, they'd already tried that, in fact they'd attempted that all night long. Peter replied, **"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!"**

If you've ever gone fishing before, you know how that feels. When you're headed out to the lake before the sun rises, you have dreams of catching these great, big trophy fish. You can see yourself proudly holding them out for the camera as the moment is captured. And sometimes that happens, but more often than not you leave the lake without any sort of trophy catch. And if you're like me, you often leave completely empty-handed. And it's frustrating to go out with expectations and then to just end up sitting there for hours.

But now imagine that you absolutely *needed* to catch some fish when you went out, that you weren't just fishing for pleasure but rather for your livelihood. Peter, Andrew, James, and John owned a fishing business together—there life depended on fishing. And they were good at it too. This was what they'd always done! They knew where to fish, when to fish, how to fish, what bait to use, what was biting—these were experts when it came to fishing on the Sea of Galilee, and yet they caught nothing. And here Jesus, not a fisherman, turns to them and says, "Hey, *why don't you try it one more time?*" I'm sure they wanted to protest this, but instead, Peter says, **"At your Word, we will let down our nets."** Because YOU said so, Lord.

And that's really all you need, isn't it? For Jesus to say so. There may be those times when you look like these four fishermen—tired, exhausted, frustrated. Perhaps it's after an extremely frustrating week of work, and you just want to quit. Perhaps you have anxiety over some problem in your life, and you just can't get over it. Perhaps you've lost all ambition and motivation to really do anything. Perhaps you can't pull yourself out of bed in the morning because you're depressed. Maybe you have been working really hard to overcome some temptation, but you keep falling into the same sin. Maybe you're trying to overcome some

addiction, and you keep failing. Perhaps you keep reaching out to the same person in love, hoping to reestablish a relationship you once enjoyed, yet you are constantly turned away and ignored, and you just want to give up.

In everyday situations just like these, Jesus calls on us to look to *Him* for strength. Peter and the other disciples, they knew their business yet caught nothing, but just because Jesus said so, their nets were filled to bursting, and the boats began to sink. This is an important reminder to us. What you cannot do, Jesus can do and has done. He's walked in your shoes, He's handled every problem, and He is not absent now as you go through the same difficulties. Jesus is teaching us here to rely upon Him—even when our efforts seem fruitless. Rely upon Him, turn to Him in prayer, and hang upon His Words and promises, because when Jesus promises something, we don't need anything else.

Now, Peter and the other disciples' failure to catch anything during that night of fishing was emblematic of their lives as a whole, and, really, our lives as well. Because we, along with them, live lives of failure. We struggle against temptation, and, more often than not, we fall into that sin. We look into God's Law, we know what He expects, and in every single way we fail to live the lives God expects of us. We've struck out completely!—not just at fishing, but at life itself.

When we realize this to be true about ourselves, we need to see what Peter saw when he looked at Jesus that day. At this point, he knew Jesus to be a great teacher. His brother Andrew had been there that day when John the Baptist told his followers that they needed to be following Jesus instead. A little later on, Peter had even invited Jesus into his home because his mother-in-law was sick, and Jesus healed her. Undoubtedly, Peter had a great level of respect for Jesus. But notice how everything really starts to click for him here at *this* miracle. Peter sees that even the fish of the sea are under the command of this great teacher, and so Peter recognizes Him for who He is, falls down before Him and says, ***“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”***

When he compares his own failure and the Savior's success, and he realizes that he is a sinner and has no business being in the same boat as this man who clearly was God—he humbles himself and asks Jesus to leave. And he gets it half right. He realizes he is a sinner, that much is true. But the solution to that problem was not to have Jesus depart from him. That would be like a sick patient in the hospital asking the doctor to leave because they are sick. And as ridiculous as that sounds, we often do the same to Jesus. When we fall into sin and feel guilty over it, we tend to try to hide those sins, like Adam and Eve. We find it difficult to admit those sins before God, because we get the feeling that He's just so disappointed in us. And who could blame Him if He was? I've failed so much, and so have you.

But when we see our own failure, and our sin weighs heavily upon us, the answer is not to depart from God. The answer is to fall before His feet and say, “I am a sinful man, a sinful woman, a sinful father, a sinful mother, a sinful spouse, Lord, I am a sinful child”—and then wait there and listen to what *Jesus* has to say about it. This is what He said to Simon, and this is what He says to you as well. These are **Words That You Can Hang Upon: “Do not be afraid,”** your Savior says. “Do not be afraid of your sins, for I have forgiven them all. Do not be afraid of your failures, for I have conquered all things. Do not be afraid of the devil, of the world, of death, for I have bought you for Myself; you are *Mine*.”

Now we ought to be clear about one thing: this text is not teaching us that as long as you trust in God, He's going to make us fabulously wealthy or make all of our efforts fruitful like He did for those fisherman. Many sermons have been preached with that as the great lesson to this text. The point of this miracle is to show us exactly what it proved to the disciples—that Jesus is God, and that, as God, His Words are words to hang upon and listen to and depend on. His purpose is to show us that even in the midst of our failures, we can continue to depend on Him, because He has given us something much greater than a large catch of fish or earthly riches. He's caught us up from the depths of hell, giving His life for our own.

And now that He's claimed you as His own, He sends you out to be fishers of men—that is to invite others to church, to warn one another against sin, to comfort repentant sinners with the Word of forgiveness through Christ. Sometimes, as you fish for men, you're going to feel like these four men did after a night of toiling away and catching nothing. But even when these things don't seem to be working, when our outreach efforts as a church seem to come back empty, even when loved ones seem to turn away from God's Word—in this miracle Jesus is showing us that even when our efforts fail, He still has the power, and He continues to work. He says, ***“Let down your nets for a catch [again].”*** My prayer is that our response will always be, ***“Lord, at your word I will let down the nets.”***

Because the net that we use is the Word of God, which is powerful and effective. It's that same Word which God promises, ***“Shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*** (Isaiah 55:11) It's already succeeded in turning you from the blindness and hopelessness of unbelief into believers who see their Savior and have a certain hope of salvation. It's the same Word which succeeded in turning these weary fishermen into eager fishers of men.

And notice what their response is to this miracle. They pull up this huge catch of fish, but they don't fall there before the fish marveling at their fortune. They fall before Jesus. They realized that the One who gave them the fish was obviously much greater than the fish themselves. Similarly, the One who has given you all the blessings you have—and let's be real here, your nets are filled to bursting—He is far greater than those blessings themselves. So don't spend your time gathering around the stuff that God blesses you with, spend your time pressing in and hanging upon the Words of Jesus.

This is the Word of life in which he tells you, failing sinners, that it's all been forgiven, it's all been paid for. You don't need to be afraid for you have peace with God. The physical treasures come and go, but this Word will remain; it will not change, it will not fail, it will not be opposed. Jesus' words of peace have been spoken of you and to you.

So, hang upon that Word. Listen to that Word. Depend on that Word. Even if your nets come up empty, even if the physical blessings seem to dry up—what this Word speaks about is the one thing no one can take from you. In His Word God promises you eternal life in Heaven with Jesus Christ your Lord. Because of that, we can say with Job, ***“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”*** That's the proper perspective. May God grant that to each of us so that we hang upon His Word every day of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.