

“Catch of the Day”

Luke 5:1-11

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

Stone Mountain, Georgia

February 4, 2007

There are two types of fishermen; those that are surprised when they catch a lot of fish and those that are surprised when they don't. I am in the former category, which is probably why I don't fish much. I usually go with very low expectations.

I think it is safe to say that Peter, James and John pushed off from the shore that morning with low expectations. After all, they had fished all night and caught nothing. Why should they think going back into the water would yield different results? So why did they go?

They went out of respect for Jesus, who encouraged them to head to deep waters and let down their nets. No doubt they were glad they did. To their surprise, they caught so many fish that they had to have help hauling them to the shore.

As you would expect, this is more than a story about fishing and filled with more surprises than a successful fishing expedition. As a matter of fact, this text is filled with surprises that have profound implications for us. Let me share them with you.

I find it surprising that Jesus was still teaching and helping people after what happened to him in his hometown of Nazareth. In Luke's account, what occurred just prior to this story? Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue to preach only to have his long-time friends reject him. They threw him out of the synagogue, drove him out of town and attempted to throw him over a cliff. That would have been enough for me to have thrown the towel in and walked away from ministry. Not him, though.

Jesus continued to teach about his vision of the Kingdom of God, one far more loving and inclusive than the religious leaders were promoting. He merely moved his pulpit outside where he was accepted and seemed as comfortable in this non-religious setting as he did in the synagogue. He capitalized upon this incident in Nazareth to identify with people that felt like outsiders that had no voice or power, giving them hope and becoming their advocate.

This inspires me and I hope it does you. Who among us has not felt discouraged or been rejected? Who has not entertained thoughts of walking away and quitting? Let Jesus' reaction to disappointment guide you today. If he could persevere in the midst of adversity, so can we. The same God that walked with him providing wisdom, guidance and strength will accompany us on our journey. What a difference He will make. I hope you take His hand today.

I am also surprised that Peter went fishing that morning after having been out all night. After using Peter's boat as a floating pulpit, Jesus told Peter to go fishing again. "Put out into deep waters and let down the nets for a catch" Luke 5:4. With some resistance but out of respect for Jesus, Peter did it. Why am I surprised?

Peter was drained physically and emotionally. He and the others had been fishing all night and caught nothing. They were cleaning their nets when Jesus interrupted them, a physically draining task as well. Those thick nets were heavy and cumbersome when they were wet. How easy it would have been to ignore Jesus' advice and gone home.

Who would have blamed them for being too tired to go back out with no guarantee of success?

It is easy to talk ourselves out of listening to others and following their advice. We can offer any number of logical or illogical reasons to ignore them and many times we do. I wonder what we miss.

I like Tom Ehrich's insight on this part of the story. "Digging deeper and trying harder can make amazing things possible. Life is found in the depth we cannot readily see, in water we cannot control and in casting a net with no guarantee of success."

Perhaps others see things you don't and you need to listen to them. Ask God to help you do so even when you are tired.

I am surprised that Jesus did not walk away when Peter told him to do so. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" Luke 5:8b.

This was, after all, not the first time Jesus had been told to leave somewhere. He was thrown out of the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and never returned. Why did he stick around Peter? Why would he want a disciple that confessed his failures and struggled with inferiority? Surely he needed disciples better and stronger than this.

Could it be that honesty and humility were exactly what Jesus was looking for in his disciples? These traits worked well for Moses, Isaiah, Amos and Jeremiah. Perhaps these were the kinds of people that Jesus wanted to call, too. These people would appreciate forgiveness and second chances. They would be teachable, genuine and real. They would be open to God's guiding and empowering Spirit. They would be dependable and work hard. They would relate to the very people that needed their help.

Most of all, though, I am surprised that Jesus selected fishermen to help him with his work. What in heaven's name did they know about religion? Probably not much. However, they knew a lot about life. They were intimately acquainted with working hard, taking risks, struggling to make ends meet and being disappointed. They knew how to fix things that were broken and help others in need. Maybe this was why he chose them.

It appears to me that Jesus was looking for disciples that understood the demands of life and cared for those struggling with them. He was looking for people that could dispense God's redemptive grace with words of encouragement and practical deeds of compassion. I think he found what he was looking for in those fishermen. I also think he was sending a strong message to every generation to follow. What was that message?

Ministry will involve people from every walk of life that are willing to use their talents in Jesus' name to help others. If he could use fishermen to become fishers of men, he could use carpenters, electricians and plumbers to rebuild homes after a disaster. He could use doctors and nurses to heal wounds. He could use teachers to help people develop the skills needed to take care of their families. He could use counselors to help people work through personal problems. He could use businessmen and women to teach people how to manage their time and resources. He could use students to befriend lonely classmates. In other words, he could use people of all ages in all stages of life to make the world better, one person at a time.

This is because Jesus invites you and me to bring who we are and put that to service helping others. He doesn't ask us to follow him and become something other than who we are. The same skills that made these disciples good fishermen would also make them good fishers of men. The skills that make us good carpenters, electricians,

plumbers, doctors, nurses, teachers, counselors, businessmen or friends will suit us well for ministry.

Each month our bus pulls out of our parking lot headed for the Gulf Coast. On board are members of this church with a variety of talents and skills. They give their time and use their talents to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina rebuild their homes and lives. They are doing far more than laying brick and mortar, though. They are giving people hope and a reason to persevere. With each nail that is hammered or room that is swept clean, they improve someone's quality of life and give them a reason to trust in a gracious and loving God. For you see, all work is done in the name of Christ, the one that inspires and motivates us to be compassionate. This is what it means, I believe, to be fishers of men.

When you think about it, calling fishermen was not so surprising, was it? It was Jesus' way of letting us know that everyone can be used to make the world better. This includes you and me. Jesus invites all of us to bring who we are and put that to service in reflecting the redemptive grace of God. He simply asks us to be genuine and real, honest and humble, becoming the presence of Christ in a world that still needs him.

Will you follow Peter's example and accept Jesus' invitation this morning? Will you offer your skills and talents to be used in his service? Will you let the love and grace of God speak through your helping hands? Will you rely upon the Lord to help you overcome your fears and feelings of inadequacy as Simon Peter did? I hope so. As a matter of fact, I will be surprised if you don't.