

Sermon: Our faithful walk with Jesus

Over the years I have come to two conclusions based on the Word of God and my own experience: 1) Christ still calls men and women to follow him today, and 2) Christ still calls men and women to serve him full-time.

Our text is the story of how Christ called Peter to be his disciple. In the beginning of the story, he is fishing for fish; by the end of the story, he is fishing for men.

I find it fascinating to consider the men Jesus chose as his first disciples. He started by calling men with dirt under their fingernails, blue-collar types, men without much education, men who knew about hard work and the value of perseverance. Fishermen. Jesus chose fishermen as his first followers. Not very likely to have been how we would have done it.

I wonder why he started with fishermen.

Fishermen understand this story very well. To be a fisherman you need patience above everything else. Sometimes wives will ask their husbands, "How can you stand there by the bank or in the boat or in the water for hours on end, waiting for a fish to bite?" The answer is, "It's easy." That's what fishing is all about.

The progress of this story is very simple. First Peter caught fish, then Jesus caught Peter, then Peter caught men. It all begins with a frustrated fisherman cleaning his nets after a long, hard night.

Fishing is hard work. It's one thing to fish on the weekends. It's something else to fish every day for a living. Peter, Andrew, James and John fished on the Sea of Galilee year-round. They either sold their fish locally or the fish were salt-cured and sold as far away as Spain. You wouldn't get rich that way, but a hardworking man could take care of his family.

Now it is morning and Peter, and the others are tired, exhausted, dejected, and probably in a foul mood. Now they are busy mending the nets—time-consuming work made more difficult by the frustration of knowing they caught nothing the night before.

When Jesus asks Peter if he can use his boat, Peter immediately agrees. He knows Jesus and admires him greatly. I believe he already has become a follower of sorts, but until now has never made a wholehearted commitment. So, when Jesus wants to use his boat for a pulpit, Peter is honored to grant the request.

How fitting it is. Jesus comes to the scene of Peter's failure and uses it to preach the Word. He takes the ordinary and makes it sacred. He uses a simple fishing boat as the setting for a mighty miracle.

Nothing in this story happens by chance. All is meant to teach us an important truth: God still prepares us for his call by allowing us to endure personal failure. Until we sense our need of him, we will not be ready to follow him. After all, if you think you are self-sufficient, why would you need Christ? We must be stripped of our self-confidence before we can be greatly used of God. Peter must be broken before he is ready to respond to the call of Christ.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets".

The words of Jesus contain both a command and a promise. It's not as if Jesus is saying, "Let's go out into the deep water, put down the nets, and we'll see what happens." Jesus is promising that if Peter obeys, he will catch fish. I'm sure that after a long night of fruitless fishing, this must have been hard to believe.

There were certainly reasons for Peter to be skeptical. After all, the experience of the previous night seemed conclusive. As a professional fisherman, Peter knew the lake. And he knew that sometimes even the best fishermen get aren't successful.

He decided to go fishing in the middle of the day. Why? All fishermen know the answer. He went because he was a fisherman, and every fisherman lives by the principle: "You never know what may happen next time."

True fishermen are always ready to give it another go. Why not? When you have an unsuccessful day on the lake, you can't wait to get back out on the water again. And there is always a reason you failed the last time. Too much light, too little light, the water was too clear or too muddy, the fish were too deep or too shallow, there was too much wind or not enough wind. It doesn't matter, does it? Fishermen love to fish. And that's why Peter was ready to go even after a futile night of frustration.

Then Peter added, "I will let down the nets." We still have a part to do. The fish aren't going to jump in the boat by themselves. We still must do what we must do. There is still work for us to do.

I believe there are many answers to prayers that await only one thing: "Let down your nets." Put your net down into the deep water, do your part, and then God will do his.

When they had done so, they caught so many fish that their nets began to break. So, they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

This is what fishermen dream about. They spend a lifetime fishing in hopes that maybe one day something like this will happen to them. What a sight!

Think about that. Two overloaded boats with fish flopping everywhere slowly coming to shore. This is the biggest catch ever—and it happened in the middle of the day.

Those fish were in the water the night before; Peter just couldn't find them. But when Jesus is in the boat, everything changes. Everything is happening according to God's plan. He allowed Peter to fail so he would learn what he could do with Jesus' help.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

This is the kind of confession we don't often hear today. One might expect Peter to start bragging to his friends, "Hey, look at all these fish! We're the greatest fishermen in the world."

But instead, Peter is overwhelmed by the enormous catch of fish. To Peter, a good catch might be 30 fish or 50 or perhaps 100 fish. But he never dreamed of catching 5000 fish at one time. Instead of elating him, the sight of such a huge catch evaporated his confidence and left him dazed and frightened.

Like most of us, Peter thought in "man-sized" categories, not "God-sized" miracles. He had room in his mind for anything he himself could handle. But when Jesus got involved, the results absolutely amazed him and drove him to his knees in desperate prayer.

Once Peter realized who Jesus really was—the true Son of God from heaven—he saw himself in a new light. To see God is to see ourselves as we really are. And sometimes the vision is too much for us to handle. Peter could not stand the contrast between the purity and power of Christ and his own sinfulness.

Here is a man who has been deeply changed on the inside. His pride has been burned away by a transforming vision of Christ.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So, they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

I find it significant that Jesus seems in a sense to ignore Peter's desperate confession of unworthiness. Jesus knows the truth about Peter, and he knew it all along. What matters is that Peter now knows the truth about himself. With his pride stripped away, he is now ready to serve the Lord.

There is an important lesson for us to ponder in all this: When we encounter Jesus, we will never be the same again. No one can meet Jesus and walk away unchanged. We may end up closer to God or we may harden our hearts, but no one ever meets Jesus and stays the way they were before.

In Peter's case, his confession became part of his testimony. He knew he was a sinner and wasn't ashamed to admit it. God can use a man who knows his weakness and doesn't try to hide it.

By trade Peter was a fisherman—and evidently a good one. Now Jesus is going to give Peter a new occupation. Before this day he had fished for fish, but now he will fish for men. Peter will cast the gospel net and catch men for the Savior. And not just in small groups. On the day of Pentecost 3000 men will respond to his powerful gospel sermon.

The same thing happens to all of us sooner or later. When we respond to Christ's call, he changes us and then he changes our personal agenda. If we decide to take Christ seriously, we may end up doing something we never thought possible, like being the worship leader for a congregation.

We wonder, "What if Jesus asks me to do something I can't do?"

He will! He always does. If he only asked you to do stuff you could already do, you wouldn't need him. But when he asks us to do something we can't do, he gives us the power to do what we thought we could never do. And we end up doing it.

I do not mean to suggest that everyone must give up their career and move on to something new. For most of us, the call of Christ means going back to work tomorrow morning with a new determination to serve Jesus Christ on the job. Or it means staying right where you are—even in the midst of personal difficulty—as part of your faithfulness to Christ, walking the "Jesus Road"

For Peter and the others following Christ meant leaving behind the old life, giving up the boats and the nets and their livelihood, and following Christ into an unknown future. Letting go must always come first. Anything that hinders our walk with Christ must go. Even some good things must go in order that better things may come from the Lord. We can't have it both ways.

The word for "followed" means "to walk the same road." That's what a disciple does—he walks the same road as Jesus. He gets on the "Jesus

Road” and follows it wherever it may lead. No guarantees, no deals, no special promises. He simply walks that road every day, following in his master’s footsteps.

Don’t be afraid to follow Jesus. You’ll never regret starting down the “Jesus Road.” You’ll only regret that you waited so long to do it.

Are you ready to follow Jesus wherever he leads? That’s all he wants.

They gave up everything and followed him! And my heart cries out, “Me too, Lord. Me too!” Amen