

**'Follow Me'**

*Jesus will show us how and where to gather people into God's Kingdom*

.....**Luke 5: 1 - 11** .....

***"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' <sup>5</sup>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.' <sup>6</sup>When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup>For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup>and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' <sup>11</sup>So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.".....***

When Jesus asked Simon if he could use his boat that day, it probably wasn't a big inconvenience. After all, they were done fishing for the day. They'd already been out all night and had returned with nothing. They were cleaning up, washing their nets; and most likely were very disappointed and hoping for better luck next time.

Jesus had come down to the lakeshore, just south from Capernaum, to tell the people there about the Kingdom of God. The people gathered around him at the edge of what we call the 'Sea of Galilee', but which Luke called a 'lake,' by its Greek name, **'Gennesaret.'**<sup>1</sup>

As the crowd grew, it became difficult for him to be heard as they crowded around him. When Jesus looked down the beach, and saw Simon with some fishermen, he asked Simon if he could use his boat, so that the people could hear him better.

So, Simon and Jesus climbed into his boat and rowed out a little way. No doubt Simon, sitting next to Jesus, could clearly hear the word from God that Jesus was teaching. But no one, especially Simon, expected what happened next.

After Jesus finished teaching, he asked Simon to take his nets back out into the deeper water, to try again for fish. Because of the time of day, Simon knew that they would have no chance to catch any fish. The fish wouldn't be there. Because he was an expert in fishing on this lake, he knew where the fish were and where they weren't at any given time of day. It was his livelihood, after all, and he was very good at his job.

Let's just put ourselves in Simon's place for a minute. Don't you think that if it were you in this situation, you might feel a bit insulted if Jesus started telling you how to do your job? If

<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel According to Luke (I - IX)*, The Anchor Bible (Doubleday and Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 1981), 565.

you already knew from experience that what Jesus was asking you to do, just wouldn't work, wouldn't you be reluctant to do it?

Let's also remember that there were a lot of people on the beach watching and listening. If Simon *did* do what Jesus told him to do, all the people might think that he had lost his mind, because no reputable fisherman would try to fish at this time of day. Simon risked humiliation and his credibility with the community.

But Simon agreed to humor Jesus, no doubt very reluctantly. It's easy to imagine that Simon might have been a bit sarcastic in his response to Jesus: ***'Because you say so, I will let down the nets.'***

All eyes from shore were on Simon's boat as the men lowered the nets. When they did, they were amazed to see so many fish caught in them. They ***'signaled'*** the other boat to help them, because their own boat couldn't handle the immense catch.

Most likely these were not small boats. A fishing boat from Jesus' time has recently been recovered from the Sea of Galilee and the hull was 26 ½ feet long and 7 ½ feet wide.<sup>2</sup> If Simon's boats resembled this one, then the amount of fish was huge!

If there were ever a *'Facebook'* moment, this would be it. Simon Peter had just hauled in the catch of a lifetime. No doubt the revenue would send his business profits through the roof. To everyone who witnessed it, the future looked pretty fabulous for Simon and Associates, *'Fishermen Extraordinaire'*. No one would have blamed him if he would have wanted to brag about it.

But that's not how Simon saw it. Simon's eyes saw far more than a miraculous catch of fish. Simon suddenly realized that he was in the same boat with the power of God. And he fell to his knees in fear.

Why was he afraid? You'd think he would be hugging Jesus and screaming for joy. No. He was terrified. He was terrified because he instantly realized, standing beside Jesus' holiness that he was so very un-holy.

It was the same reaction Isaiah had when he was lifted into the throne room of God. Isaiah was overwhelmed by God's holiness and said, ***'Woe to me! I am ruined!' '...I am a man of unclean lips.'*** (Isaiah 6:5)

So, Simon begged Jesus, ***'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'*** Some of us know just what that feels like. Can you remember that moment when you saw yourself as you were, by the light of God's holiness, and how it made your soul tremble? I can.

When Jesus allows us to catch sight of our sin, and see our true selves, exposed clearly and stripped from all pretense, we can't help but cry out, *'Lord, in your mercy forgive me!'* And that's what happened to Simon.

But then, in his grace-filled way, Jesus said, ***'Do not be afraid.'*** God seems to like to use that catch-phrase right before He commissions someone to join in His mission. He said it to

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<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke: The New American Commentary*, Vol. 24. (B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 169.  
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Moses and Joshua and Mary and Joseph. God also used it to reassure: **'do not be afraid'** in my presence and **'do not be afraid'** of what I am asking you to do.

Jesus, in essence, said the same to Simon and to James and John, the other fishermen who were there that day, when he asked them to join him in **'catching'** men instead of fish. The Greek word Luke used for **'catch'** is *'zogreo,'* (*dzoh-greh-oh*) which means to *'capture for life.'*<sup>3</sup> Instead of fishing nets, the fishermen would now use God's Word to gather people into the Kingdom of God.

Simon and the others obviously believed in Jesus' mission. They didn't seem to hesitate at all as **'they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.'**

I just can't help but wonder what their families thought. If Simon and James and John were married, and they just up and quit the business, who would take care of their families? What would Zebedee, who had built up his fishing company, have to say when his sons James and John deserted him? We don't know many details, but we do know that Zebedee's wife, Salome, must not have disapproved, because she also joined her sons to become a faithful follower of Jesus. (*Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40*)

How many of us would be willing to risk financial security, the comforts of home and family and everything familiar to follow wherever Jesus asked us to go? Whatever our decision, we would likely want to take our time to prayerfully weigh the pros and cons. It would be a huge life-change. But that's not what happened when people in the Bible came face to face with Jesus. When they accepted the truth he revealed, their lives were instantly changed.

What message do you think this Word from God has for us today? We know that Jesus' mission to the people on earth hasn't changed since he called Simon and James and John. We know that Jesus still asks us to follow him in order to gather people into the Kingdom.

He told us so, very plainly in his Great Commission before God took him back up into Heaven. Jesus said, **'Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'** (*Matthew 28: 19*)

I think I speak for most of us in saying that while we know what Jesus wants us to do, it is just so hard to do it. In many ways, we're a lot more like Simon than we realize. It's like we're right there with him in the boat, and we're afraid to do what Jesus is asking us to do because we don't want to look foolish in front of other people.

I mean, what if we don't **'catch'** anything and no one responds to our message? What if our neighbors think we are out of our mind? What if our reputations suffer? What will happen to our families if we go **'overboard'** with Jesus?

If we truly believe that no one is able to be part of God's Kingdom without Jesus' remedy for sin, then we cannot **'be afraid'** of the **'what ifs.'** We need to stick to the same script that Jesus gave his disciples.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2221&t=NIV>  
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Jesus plainly said, **'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'** (Matthew 4:17) **'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'** (John 14:6) We really can't avoid the reality that Jesus is counting on us to invite others into God's Kingdom.

How do we do this? We simply follow Jesus. I know that it sounds simpler than it is. While Jesus probably won't ask us to be missionaries overseas, Jesus does want us to follow him in every minute of our days. In our private life, in our family life and in our community life; Jesus asks us to follow him all the time. Whatever we do, whatever we say, if we are focused on following Jesus, Jesus will show us how to point other people to him too.

It doesn't matter to Jesus how unequipped we are. It doesn't matter how smart we are or how successful we are. Jesus says, **'Follow me,'** you can join my mission just the way you are.

What does it look like to follow Jesus? We ask Jesus what he wants us to do and then we focus on following him. We want everyone to look past us and see Jesus. We want all the glory to go to him.

If someone says to us, *'Why are you are being so nice after what I did to you?'* our response could be, *'I want to share the forgiveness Jesus has given me with you.'* Or, if we are complimented on doing a good job, we would give Jesus the credit, and say, *'Thank you, but it was only because of Jesus' help.'* I know this idea may take some getting used to, but when we know that we are powered by Jesus' Spirit living inside us, we can't help but give the credit where it is due.

When we follow Jesus, we focus only on him. When we do, Jesus will bless others through us as we follow him into his mission field. We don't need to be afraid that what we do for Jesus will not be as important as what someone else might do. Jesus just wants us to be willing to follow, even if it seems very insignificant.

This week I read about a man who was a traveling salesman, and he was a follower of Jesus. During one business trip, he tried to check into the local hotel and was told that they were full. Out of necessity, he ended up sharing a room with a stranger, who was also traveling salesman.

That night, the salesman pulled a Bible out of his suitcase and began to read as was his habit. The other man asked him to read the Bible out loud, so he did. The two men stayed up praying and discussing how good it was to have the Word of God when they were away from home. They added another man to their group and came up with the idea of providing Bibles in hotel rooms so all travelers could learn about the Kingdom of God.

And so, the *'Gideon Bible Society'* was born, and the good news from God reached into hotels all over the world, because a few men were willing to follow Jesus in the midst of their everyday lives.<sup>4</sup>

How can we follow Jesus right here in Burgettstown? Where does Jesus want us to let down our nets so that we can gather in others to share in God's Kingdom blessings?

Let's follow Jesus, together. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Gideons\\_International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gideons_International)  
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