

**Series: Far Horizons**  
**Sermon: Left Everything and Followed**  
**Scripture: Luke 5:1-11**

**February 9, 2025**  
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**1** One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. **2** Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. **3** Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. **4** When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch." **5** Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets." **6** So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. **7** They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. **8** When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner!" **9** Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. **10** James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." **11** As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

You ever had one of those rubber meets the road moments? Those decisions in which you are all in or it's all over? Back in our younger years, when Tim and I were first married, we were not only paramedics together but we were also on a rescue crew, so we had to get all these certifications in order to do our jobs well and one of the certifications was in high level rescue. Now, I don't like heights. This was not something I looked forward to, but then one day, there I was, standing in the third story window of a building, about to step out and trust a few ropes and some knots my new husband had tied, to keep me from crashing onto the concrete below. I was terrified. I made it out the window, I made it two tiny steps but I realized the third step was the point of no return, I wouldn't be able to reach the window if I went further. So...naturally...I panicked. I started yelling, "Nope. Nope. Bring me back up. I can't do this." It was then I look up in the loving face of my precious husband. He smiled sweetly, and I thought...Oh, my knight in shining armor, he's gonna pull me up. Without another word, his face disappeared, and his boot emerged over the side of the windowsill...and he planted it firmly on my forehead and yelled, "Nope, you aren't coming back up here," and he ever so gently pushed me until I took the third step.

Yes, we miraculously celebrated our 34<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last year. The thing is...I needed to know I could do high level rescue when it was called for. I needed to step out of that window and do what I was called on to do...even if it makes no sense to step out of a perfectly good building in order to do so.

I keep imagining Simon Peter, sitting on his boat. Probably one he inherited from his father, who inherited from his father. He knows every inch of this boat, every scar in the wood from its journeys through storms and its battles with riggings and nets. This was his life and even if he had a bad night of fishing, he probably saw no reason to step out of a perfectly good life...until he met Jesus. Sitting there in his boat, the sun barely above the horizon...the market stalls are

starting to open but there will be no fish to fill the baskets because despite fishing all night...every single boat came up empty. No fish in the baskets meant no pay to take home to their families. Maybe Simon Peter and the other fishermen are at a low point...maybe the lowest of their careers, when Jesus shows up. But then...Jesus has a tendency to do that right? To come along just when we are at our low point...just when we are questioning our career paths or our choices that have left us hanging precariously over some ledge.

It's amazing that Simon Peter agrees to take Jesus onboard so he could continue to teach the growing crowd. Maybe he was caught up in what Jesus was teaching but who knows – Luke doesn't even tell us what Jesus was saying...only that at some point, Jesus stops teaching and asks Simon Peter to go deeper. Surely there was an eyeroll in there somewhere as Simon Peter said, "Come on, we've been out there all night. We know what we are doing. There simply aren't any fish." But, even as he protests, he is preparing the rigging to move...to go just where Jesus wants. Why? Because Jesus said so.

Jesus has told me where to go a few times. How about you? I tend to question and argue and plead. I'm tired, Lord. It won't do any good, Lord. I can't make a difference, Lord. It doesn't make any sense to do it this way, Lord. I can do that all day. But not Simon Peter. Because you say so, Lord, I'll do it...but I can also sense an "I told you so," being prepared. Regardless, they go back out, into deep water...and have the best catch of their careers. So many fish it breaks the nets and almost sinks the boats! So, when Jesus says, lay it all down and follow me...they don't hesitate. They go!

Who walks away from the biggest catch of their lives? What kind of fisherman has the best day on the water ever, and then lays down their pole and declares, "Never again!" How does one turn their backs on family traditions and profitable livelihoods to strike out for the unknown and unsecure?

I marvel at Simon and the others for so readily going into the deep, for dropping everything so quickly and saying yes when the invitation came. It is not something that comes naturally to many of us who have so many questions. Follow you where? What is the risk? What will I lose? Who are we fishing for again? What exactly will my job description be? Cause we want answers!

Going deep is naturally going to stir some anxiety...but Jesus knew that...it's why he said to Simon, don't be afraid, because I have a purpose for you. I have a purpose beyond coming out here every night and throwing nets into a water which may or may not yield a catch. I have a purpose that will yield something far more precious. Trust me. I've prepared the ropes, tied the knots, I've got you...step #3 is gonna be a doozy, but I've got you.

I can imagine Simon looking at the nets bursting open and seeing it all so clearly... Jesus' power in calling the fish to the net...and maybe he felt his compassion stir to use that power to save the people who were floundering and at risk of drowning in their sins and distress and hopelessness. I mean, just a few hours ago hadn't Simon felt the same way? Useless, powerless, unworthy. He didn't even want to stand in the same boat as Jesus, "Get away, I'm too sinful for you to be here!" Haven't we all felt that way at times? Haven't we all yearned to hear Jesus say, "your sin has not condemned you; I have a new life to offer that holds purpose

and mercy.” And maybe that is the key to unlocking Simon’s motivation.

Our world can be merciless. It has no pity for fishermen who labor all night and have nothing to sell at the market the next morning so he can feed his children. We have no mercy for those who’s bad choices have created struggle, even if they are repentant and want a second chance. We have no mercy for those who are different, whose values seem foreign, whose skin has a different hue or whose voice an unrecognized accent.

We have little mercy for the poor, the outcast, the ones who flounder in the shallows and can’t find their footing on the shore.

Maybe Simon was so moved by Jesus simply taking notice of his struggle that he would have followed him anywhere...into the deep...onto the shore...out to the world in order to show people that compassion and grace and mercy really is available to the powerless.

Maybe, for the first time in his life, Simon felt empowered to do something to save a world that felt as desperate as he often did. Maybe he felt excited to be told he could make a difference in the world...that he could do something to pull people up and set them on their feet again...to move them from bone-weary frustration to joy-inducing hope. Simon Peter was ready to take the step...and unlike me, didn’t need a boot to the forehead to get him going.

We have choices, friends – we can choose to be part of the systems that inflict suffering, or we can be part of solutions that alleviate it...we can choose to be part of power structures that protect the powerful or we can serve the power of God that protects the most vulnerable and disadvantaged...we can choose to turn a blind eye to those who are suffering and look out only for ourselves, or we can hear the call to step into the deep of the worlds pain and start pulling people to safety. We can choose to cooperate with the callous or we can be a people of compassion and mercy that opens the eyes of the blind, binds the brokenhearted, liberates the oppressed, sets the convicted free, and offers the second chances that people need...

We can partner with Jesus, or we can say no, and just keep sitting on the shore maintaining our own nets. The choice is ours and there is no time like the present to rise and say, “I’ll go...send me.”