

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**C: Epiphany 5 – Jesus and the Big Catch
Luke 5:1-11**

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Salem, Bridgeport**

“The Day Peter’s Life Was Changed”

Peter sat back, breathing a deep sigh of satisfaction.

It was so good to have his cousin and her husband and their friends visiting.

The food at dinner had been delicious and plentiful, the wine good and free-flowing.

Rebecca’s husband Samuel had just asked him a question

that he had been asked hundreds – maybe thousands – of times before:

What had changed him from an ordinary fisherman in backwater Galilee

into a powerful preacher traveling around the world?

There were so many ways to answer that question.

He could start with Pentecost... and the sound of that roaring wind

and the heat of that fire that had seeped from his head into his heart

where it expanded and filled him with such joy

that it just bubbled out in a language of praise and thanksgiving in words that he didn’t even understand!

Or he could scroll back to that day when he saw Jesus alive after he had been dead in the tomb!

Or he could scroll back farther to that day on the mount where Jesus was glowing & Elijah & Moses were there!

Or he could scroll back to the beginning....

He glanced out the window. It was still early. And he felt like talking, sharing, witnessing!

And so he told them how the first time he had ever hear of Jesus

was the day his wife, Joanna, had rushed in from shopping,

breathlessly telling him about witnessing an amazing sight.

In the center of town there had been this man who was clearly out of his mind,

raving like a bloody lunatic, obviously possessed by a demon.

And into the ruckus a man with a powerful presence had stepped up

and in the name of the most high God had cast the demon right out of the man!

She had heard that the man’s name was Jesus

and over the next several weeks the town was abuzz with news of this traveling rabbi

who was going from town to town,

healing people from illness and injuries and even permanent disabilities.

And then came the day when Joanna’s mother had fallen ill.

They had tried all of the usual remedies, but she got worse.

They’d brought in the local healer but his herbal tea and spiced poultice didn’t work either.

As her mother grew more feverish, Joanna was beside herself,

and Peter who had to do SOMETHING finally remembered the stories about Jesus

and had tracked him down in a neighboring town and begged him to come back with him.

Jesus had come, and had prayed, and had laid hands on his mother-in-law and she was healed instantly and fully

– as was evidenced by the fact she insisted on preparing dinner for them all!

And then came the day when he and his brother Andrew had been out all day fishing,

along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and they hadn’t caught a single fish all night!.

They were exhausted, disappointed, frustrated, and hungry.

As they brought their boats back in to shore,

they saw that a crowd had gathered around a man standing on the beach,

and as they pulled in to shore, Peter immediately recognized the man as Jesus.

He was just thinking that if the crowd pressed any closer Jesus was going to end up on his butt in the water,

when Jesus looked over his shoulder, recognized Peter, gave him a smile & a wave, & climbed into the boat.

“I hope you don’t mind”, said Jesus, “but I think I might work better if I teach from here!”

Peter didn't mind as he and Andrew had to wash out their nets and coil the ropes
and get everything stored away for the day anyway.
While they were doing that Peter listened with half an ear but didn't pay too much attention.
By the time they were finished cleaning up, Jesus was done, and the crowd was dispersing.
Peter was just wondering whether to invite Jesus home for breakfast when Jesus suggested they go out fishing.
What?? Was he nuts?! They had been fishing all night and hadn't caught a thing!
And now it was too late in the day to fish anyway.
He told Jesus as much, but Jesus suggested they go out further where the water was deeper.
OK - now he was really being crazy.
Not only did you not fish at this time of day,
you certainly didn't go out into the deep water where wind and storm might kick up!
Fishermen stayed near the shore – everyone knew that! Besides, he just cleaned up all the fishing equipment!
But Jesus was insisting.
To do what he was asking wasn't logical or practical or safe & it certainly wasn't something he wanted to do!
He was tired, man, and hot, and hungry!
But what could he say? Jesus had healed his mother-in-law. He owed Jesus.

And so they went out & every time they slowed to stop Jesus would press them to go a bit further, a bit deeper.
Finally he signaled them to stop and told them to put the nets in,
so they dragged out the nets that it already been cleaned and stowed
and knowing very well this was pointless, they threw them over.
And that's when the most miraculous thing happened!
The nets were full of fish! The biggest catch they had ever seen in their lives!
Peter & Andrew were doing their best to try and get the nets over the side of the boat but they couldn't manage.
They saw that James and John had followed them out a ways waved to them for help,
and their friends came and they put the two boats as close together as they could
around the net, and all four of them lifted and got it up
and half of the fish fell into one boat and half into the other,
and suddenly they were up to their ankles, their knees, their thighs in fish!
And oh my God, the boats were sinking!
This man was not just a good teacher, he was not just an amazing healer,
this man had divine power and Peter was stunned and awed and terrified.
“Lord”, he said, bowing his head,
“this is too much for me to handle! I don't know what's going on here but you need to leave!”
All of a sudden he felt a tap on his head and he looked up and there was Jesus grinning at him!
“I thought you were fishermen!” said Jesus. “You don't like the catch?”
Peter had no idea what emotions were playing on his face,
but now Jesus started to laugh, and all of a sudden they all saw the utter absurdity of the situation!
This was more fish than they would catch in a month, maybe two,
and instead of being glad about it they were terrified!
They were fishermen and look what they had caught!
And pretty soon they were throwing fish up into the air and throwing fish at each other
and oh my God, they were just filled with joy!
When they got back to shore, Jesus said,
“Well, the profits from those fish should do you for a month or two,
so I think you've done your work for the day.
Time to take a break from catching fish! It's time you join me in catching people!”
Peter was just about to point out they needed to take care of the catch, but Jesus must have read his mind
because he pointed at Zebedee who was standing there speechless, his mouth agape.
“Master Zebedee”, called Jesus, “Gather some friends to help you sell those fish. These guys deserve a break.
They're coming with me.”
And the five of them traipsed off, laughing at the still stunned look on Zebedee's face.

Now what I want to say about this story is that there is nothing fishy about it.

It's not an "exaggerated big fish" story. It's not a myth. It's not fiction.

I say that because this story explains in a way none of the other gospels do

what it was that allowed those four disciples to leave everything behind and follow Jesus.

What allowed them to do that was their personal experience of God's power and love.

Now Peter knew the stories in the Bible of people who are experienced God:

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the prophets. and many more.

Peter knew that his mother-in-law had experienced God.

But this was the first time that Peter had personally experienced

the awesomeness of God's power and love in his life.

Now he didn't just know ABOUT God or ABOUT this Jesus.

NOW God's power and love had intervened in his life and that had changed everything.

I don't know about you, but as I grew up in the Lutheran Church

I was taught that of course God is powerful because God created the universe

and set things in motion and so that things could keep going through natural processes

and I was taught that God had given human beings brains

that could help keep these processes going.

But even though God had intervened in some very special people's lives in the Bible

and even though God might intervene on rare occasions in someone's life today –

like when someone with cancer was suddenly and fully healed

or when someone miraculously escaped unscathed from an accident.

I was given to believe that those kind of experiences were exceptions to the rule.

Now I know that is simply not the case.

Now I know that God has the ability to intervene & can choose to intervene in our daily lives –

ALL the time.

But we have not been taught how to invite those interventions

and we have not been taught how to notice them.

So let me point out a few things in this story.

In order for Jesus to perform that life-transforming miracle in Peter's life,

Peter had to be willing to do what Jesus asked him to do,

even though it wasn't logical or practical or safe.

He had to be willing to do again something that hadn't worked the before.

He had to be willing to do it a new way that he was unaccustomed to doing it.

He had to be willing to lay aside his own expertise and his own experience & trust in Jesus.

He had to be willing to do what Jesus asked him to do

even though he was exhausted and hungry,

and even though it required work he didn't want to do.

In order to receive the miracles God wants to perform for us,

we have to be willing to set our own wishes and desires and needs and opinions

and experience and logic and control aside

and do whatever Jesus asks – even if it seems crazy & even if we don't feel like it.

And when we do that, when we follow Jesus despite what our mind tells us,

despite our own desires, then we will be on a place where Jesus can do the impossible.

Some of you will remember that in the fall of 2020 I asked God for a miracle
and within just a few minutes I had someone I had never met in person
and only heard speak in a zoom Bible study,
call and tell me that God had directed him to give me his tithe.

He was going to send me \$1000.

I told him I didn't really need the money – that just him calling
when I had asked God for a particular sign was enough of a miracle.

And he said, "Oh no, I have to give you the money!"

God told me if I didn't give you my tithe, I have to give you all my money!

So I gave them my address and then instead of \$1000 he sent \$3500

which was enough to pay back a loan I had made to someone & to buy air cleaners for two churches to use.

Well after that miracle, more came!

So many, in fact, that in March of last year I began writing them down.

I have a journal I keep on my phone called "Signs and Wonders"

and they range from amazing huge miracles like the one I just mentioned
to little ones like I shared a few weeks ago when I said,

"God, I know you promised that someday I would end up on a beach in Jamaica
and I'm so cold and tired and stressed that I just need a little encouragement from you
that you're going to keep that promise –

and within a few hours on my phone there's a picture of the Jamaican bobsled team
and the first word on that page is Jamaica!

I don't remember to write down every sign and wonder but I write down most of them –

and do you know how many I've recorded in the last 11 months?

75! So on average I experience God intervening in my life and get a sign or a wonder every 3 or 4 days!

And here's the other thing.

Those are just the signs and wonders I noticed.

Because I'm sure there are other ones that I completely missed.

It's just like when I'm driving home from Bridgeport and I take Rte 8

and I can't tell you how many times I've missed the turn off at Exit 9 –

and if I miss that I have to drive miles and miles out of my way.

So this past week as I'm driving home and thinking about this sermon on "signs"

when I suddenly realize I'm passing an exit & I don't know which exit it is...because I've missed the sign!

And that's how it is in our lives!

We get so focused on our own thoughts, our own world, things from the past and things in the future,
that we're not paying attention in the moment and we miss the signs!

What's important about this gospel story is this:

what changed Peter from someone who knew about God

to someone who was willing to give up everything to follow Jesus

was that he experienced the power and love of God in Jesus personally.

And that's what God wants for every single one of God's children.

God did not just intervene back in Bible times.

God does not just intervene occasionally in some other people's lives.

God wants to show up in my life and your life

and do amazing powerful loving abundant generous extravagant things

just because God can and just because God wants to make your day!

So the lesson is: pay attention to what Jesus calls you to do and no matter how crazy it is, do it –

because when you do it, God will show up

and will surprise you and dazzle you and delight you in ways you cannot even imagine.

That's not just what I want for you – it's what God wants!

So get ready, folks, follow Jesus, & your boats will be so full of fish you will be laughing & crying with joy!

Amen!