

The Cross Before Me ...

For many, the events described in Luke 5:1-11 are at least somewhat familiar. We can almost smell the wooden boats, feel the dampness of the nets, see the sun glistening off the water, and hear the lapping of the waves on the shore. We can empathize with the fishermen's unsuccessful night of toiling - the backbreaking letting down of the dragnets and straining to pull them back in, only to repeatedly discover that they are empty. Jesus' imposition of using Simon Peter's boat and later expecting the fisherman to climb back into it, put into the deep water, and let his nets down once more is wearisome to witness. Simon Peter's emotional response makes complete sense, making his ensuing reply even more remarkable and admirable: "... at your word I will let down my nets" (v. 5). And, of course, we know the outcome of his obedience - two boats filled with fish to the point of sinking!

So, beyond the enormously large unexpected catch of fish, what makes Simon Peter fall at Jesus' feet and express his brokenness and shame (v. 8)? What makes Simon, his brother Andrew, and co-workers James and John leave everything and follow Him (v. 11)? Is it simply the power of another miracle demonstrating Jesus' authority over all He has created, material and immaterial? The fishermen have seen Jesus do great inexplicable things before. What is it on this particular occasion that captures their hearts?

The events that transpired on this lake, in these boats, and using these nets were **personal**. Jesus entered Simon Peter's everyday routine. He entered what Simon considered to be comfortably familiar and methodically simple and turned his life on its head. Jesus' astounding authority over the everyday ordinary caused Simon to be shaken and realize that his life is not his own. It was not Simon's lake, Simon's boat, and Simon's net. The fisherman was a sinner with nothing to offer the holy Son of God, except surrender. Similarly, it is not your life, your job, and your marriage. You - everything that you are and hold - belong to Him and are under His authority. Paul, writing to the church in Colossae, reminds us that, "For in him all things were created ... **all things have been created through him and for him**" (Col 1:16).

When this is realized - that we are sinners and have nothing to commend ourselves to God except repentance and trust - an invitation to follow Jesus on mission is presented. This mission requires that we leave everything behind (v. 11) and "count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus

my Lord.” (Phil 3:8-10). The widely loved and sung hymn, **I Have Decided To Follow Jesus**, is a simple and worshipful reminder of this truth. It likely traces its origins to Simon K. Marak, a pastor, schoolteacher, and missionary from Jorhat, Assam, India. Other hymnologists attribute it to anonymous Indian Christians who were called to renounce their faith in Jesus or face martyrdom. Regardless of its exact origin, the wonderful hymn certainly communicates a desire to follow Jesus at all cost. He is worth obeying and surrendering one’s life to Him.

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, I still will follow;
though none go with me, I still will follow;
though none go with me, I still will follow;
no turning back, no turning back.

Clearly, following Jesus and “fishing for people” should be natural responses to a personal encounter with the Jesus of the Bible. It is a call to go to your brother or sister, your friend or neighbor, your teacher or co-worker, and share the life-giving truth of the Gospel with them. The mission doesn’t wait for you to be ready - go when you’re not. The mission doesn’t wait for you to be clean and acceptable - follow when you’re not. The mission doesn't wait for you to be courageous - speak when you’re not. In the end, we follow Jesus, because He has called us and will make us fishers of men (Lk 5:10; Matt 4:19). Like the prophet Isaiah, regardless of whether anybody else responds to the call, we will say, “Here I am! Send me” (Is 6:8).

Isaiah 6:1-5 (NIV) - *“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’”*