



Fishing For People

Luke 5:1-11

In God's timing, in the small country of Israel, in the town of Nazareth, lived a man named Jesus. Early on, those who knew him saw in him more than the son of Joseph and Mary, more than a carpenter, more than a Rabbi. There was something about this man Jesus that made them think of God. There was something about the way he expressed himself in words, actions, character, and relationships with people that made them believe that when they were in his presence, they were with God. Some even said that he was a revelation of God and in him they saw God's glory revealed.

Early in his ministry Jesus, while staying in the area of the Sea of Galilee, observed four fishermen—Simon, Andrew, James and John. They were mending their nets as Jesus approached them. Jesus borrowed a fishing boat to speak to the crowd that had followed him and after speaking to the crowd invited Simon to a fishing adventure. Simon responded that they had fished all night and caught nothing, yet he was open to suggestion. Jesus asked him to launch out for the deep water and put down the nets. Simon for sure must have chuckled. This carpenter-rabbi, telling professional fishermen how to fish—they all knew that you fished the deep waters at night, not the daytime. Jesus is asking them to do the opposite of what they had spent a lifetime doing.

In the deep water they let out the nets, and the catch was so large that it took two boats to bring them in to the shore! They were astounded and worshipped him. Jesus responded by saying, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people." They left everything and followed him.

The irony here is that Jesus in choosing the first four disciples entrusted the gospel to fishermen. Who can believe fishermen? They are always exaggerating the truth: "We caught so many fish, and they were all this BIG!"

Fisher people are creatures of repetition. When I have the joy of fishing with my father, we go in his boat to the same lake and have done so for thirty-plus years. We always go to the same launching area, put in on the same side of the lake, and go to the opposite side. With miles of shoreline looking the same, we go to the same clump of trees, fish the same bald cypress knees, same snags exposed, same clay bank, all in the shallow water. We always do it the same way we always have.

In the walk of faith and the work of ministry, Jesus invites us to think about the deep water. It is frightening to consider new places to fish, out there in the deep water. Kierkegaard said, "You will never find a tidal wave in a roadside puddle." It is so because of a lack of depth. The shallow water is calm. In the deep water, you could drown; it is choppy with waves; you have no reference points; and it is chaotic.

We often are content to live out our existence in the shallow places where everything is comfortable and predictable. We make shallow commitments, and we avoid challenging ourselves or our churches. We seldom if ever ponder the treasures of the deep water.

We venture out to the deep waters when we share our Christian faith with our neighbors or welcome people of different races, nationalities, or income levels into our congregations. We launch into deep waters when we embark on mission trips, tutor low-income children who are struggling in school, or when we create alternative worship services to reach the un-churched. We can no longer depend on the old modes of outreach or on having enough babies to keep our churches growing.

The deep waters are the new territories we can explore under the command of Christ. Are we willing? If we follow Jesus to catch people in the new deep waters of our communities, we may just find there some amazing grace-filled discoveries—and a tremendous catch!

In the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

(This devotion was shared with the Imagine Ministry Team meeting on Feb. 5, 2010)