

<sup>1</sup>Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and 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 way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning 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 that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

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The gospel writer Luke likes to tell stories that have a particular formula: teach, act, call. In various spots in the gospel you will find Jesus teaching, usually about what the reign of God looks like. After that, there is an action performed by Jesus that catches people’s attention. Finally, Jesus calls the person to join him on his mission. It

is a fairly simple formula. It isn't too surprising, even if we haven't previously noticed it in Luke's gospel.

Today's narrative of the calling of Simon fits this formula. Unlike Mark and Matthew, who each tell this story in three verses total, Luke expounds upon it. There is a large crowd following Jesus, and he determines the best way to teach them is by hopping in Simon's boat and setting out into the lake a little bit. After teaching, he moves to the act portion of the formula. Jesus instructs Simon where to put down his nets. They have a miraculous catch, and Simon falls to Jesus' knees, totally amazed at the catch. To be honest, the story could have ended right there with the catch of the fish. However, Luke doesn't want that to be the climatic ending. The story ends with the calling.

Before we jump into that calling, let me point out another difference with Luke. The way Mark and Matthew tell it, the first time Jesus encounters Simon is on this shore of the lake. But in the previous chapter of Luke, Jesus encounters Simon when he needs a place to rest one night. While in Simon's house, Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. Then Luke tells us others were brought to the house to be cured of their fevers and demons. Jesus departs from Simon's home the next morning. We don't know exactly how much time passes between that night and today's gospel narrative, but it was enough time for Jesus to visit a variety of synagogues in Judea to teach. We can only speculate on the details. *Was Simon intrigued by this Jesus guy when he was curing people like Simon's mother-in-law? Or did Simon assume that Jesus was nothing more than a traveling teacher? Why didn't Jesus call Simon to follow him when staying at his home? And after Jesus left Simon's home, did Simon give him any thought?* We don't know, because Luke doesn't tell us.

What we are told is that when Simon noticed the haul of fish that he never expected, that is when he fell to Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Jesus replied, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Simon and the brothers James and John dropped everything and followed him. That is the climatic point of the story: the calling. It is the culmination of Luke's formula: teaching, then acting, and finally calling. Whatever it was that Simon felt between his first encounter with Jesus and this haul of the fish, we don't know. But it culminated in Simon being called.

There is good news in those silent parts of Simon's story, because we can easily connect with his experience. This isn't the case for everyone, but follow me here: Whether we consider ourselves Christian or not, we know about Jesus. Let's say we're intrigued by him, however perhaps "lukewarm" is the best description of the relationship. It is easy for us to see Simon in a similar light. What today's story of Simon tells us is that Jesus can act in our lives at any time. It doesn't have to be our first encounter with him. What that act is could be a number of things: it might surprise us, or it simply could be a realization that moves us. Whatever it is, it allows us to ponder how human we are and how awesome God is. For Simon it wasn't his first encounter with Jesus, and it doesn't have to be our first encounter with him either. When Simon experienced this act that moved him, he said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" It is there, in a humble understanding of our true selves, that Jesus tells us that it is okay. He accepts us as we are. He calls us to walk more closely to him, to live a life that is directed by God's love.

Jesus told Simon that he would now catch people, which is a nice play on Simon's career as a fisher. But that was Simon's call. Ours will likely be different. I

don't expect that my life will ultimately "catch people" in numbers that Simon Peter's life did. You shouldn't expect that either, and – frankly – numbers shouldn't be our goal or motivation. The old hymn says, "If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, who died to save us all." What we should expect is that walking with Jesus will make us a more loving version of ourselves. That's the motivation; that's the goal. That path might not be easy. It will challenge us and it will reshape us, and Jesus is with us through it all.

When we look at the formula that Luke often used to shape his narratives — teach, act, call — we can recognize how that formula applies to our narratives as well. We are taught the message of Jesus, that the kingdom of God's reign is witnessed here – in this place – when all people are cared for, loved, and respected. We see Christ act in some way in our life. It could be something we can't explain, or it just might be something that makes us sense God's presence in the ordinary.

Finally, we are called. We are called to follow this path that Jesus has for us. Humility, love, and sacrifice are all wrapped up in the journey. So we accept the call, we follow Jesus, and somewhere along the way we will realize that Jesus has made us a more loving version of ourselves.

Thanks be to God. Amen.