

## “Be Not Afraid VI”

**Luke 5:1-11**

**August 17, 2025**

The text for today is the familiar story of Jesus calling the first disciples. Fishermen Jesus knew were by the Sea of Galilee, and after a long night of fishing, they were cleaning their nets. Because the crowd was pressing in on Jesus, he asked to use one of the boats to speak from, and the fishermen agreed. When Jesus was done with his teaching, he told Simon to put out into the deep water and let down their nets for a catch.

Presumably, Simon was an experienced fisherman, and Jesus was a simple carpenter so Simon must have wondered about this direction. Simon tries to explain to Jesus how tired he is and how he has already tried that, but he does say, acknowledging Jesus’ status, “Master...if you say so.” Simon does this and the nets fill up, so much that they are breaking, so that Simon must call for help. The fish fill both boats. Simon sees this and falls down at Jesus’ knees saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Simon has moved from calling Jesus “Master” to recognizing him as “Lord.” Jesus then says, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people.”

Now I have to be honest here: the metaphor that changes from “fishermen catching fish” to “fishermen being catchers of men” has always bothered me. Oh, it is not the translation of being “catchers of **men**” instead of “men and **women**” that bothers me. It is the “**catching**” idea, that somehow when we preach the gospel, we “catch” the people as one catches fish on a hook.

This metaphor’s bothersome nature was softened a bit when I realized that the fishermen of Jesus’ day fished by using large nets, so people were “caught” as a

group in a **net** and not on a painful **hook with a barb** as one fish. Yet it still bothered me. While one minister I know always said, “Different people, different bait,” I still didn’t like thinking of my work having bait dangle on a hook to catch people on the gospel.

The metaphor was again softened, however, when I discovered this, at what I consider a reputable Bible site:

*... Most of the Old Testament verses regarding God sending fishermen—or hunters—to capture people are negative and refer to punishment.... "Catching," here [in this text], is from the Greek root word zōgrōn and specifically means to capture alive. Jesus is not going to send these fishermen to judge others. Rather, they seek to **rescue** them.<sup>1</sup>*

This fits better with my understanding of what we ministers do, for the Bible reminds us that God did not send Jesus to **condemn** the world; rather, he sent Jesus that the world might be **saved** through him.<sup>2</sup>

Another commentator<sup>3</sup> also speaks to this, writing:

*Catching fish has limits as a metaphor for winning disciples, because the fate of the caught fish is to be killed and eaten while the disciple’s role is to live for Christ. The Greek word zogron is commonly used for trapping—capturing alive. Jesus’ disciples will be inviting people into the kingdom of God, where they will become free from the things that had bound them. //*

Another issue then appeared for me, though. Here, Jesus says “**Do not be afraid**, from now on you will be catching people.” Why would Simon be afraid?

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<sup>1</sup> BibleRef.com

<sup>2</sup> John 3:17.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Donovan, “Biblical Commentary: Luke 5:1-11.”

If you look at the text, it says that they began to sink. Is Simon afraid of sinking? Is that why Jesus says, “do not be afraid?” I don’t think so; Simon is an experienced fisherman and probably knows well how to swim.

Simon’s words remind me of the prophet Isaiah’s words at his call. Isaiah has a vision of God and says, “Woe is me, I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts!” Upon seeing the holy God, Isaiah realizes his own unholiness and unworthiness.

Perhaps upon realizing Jesus is truly God here, his word is true, Simon has the same reaction. In Isaiah, God sends an angel to touch Isaiah’s lips and blot out his guilt. In the gospels, Jesus will save people from their sins by his death. In both stories, God calls the one to whom he speaks to ministry.

Commentator Richard Donovan<sup>4</sup> notes here:

*We have largely lost our sense of wonder and fear in God’s presence. Instead, we worship at the altar of science and technology, which present us with new wonders every day. We worship at the altar of self-esteem, resisting humility and contriteness as if they constituted some sort of emotional disease. We even imagine that we have the right to set conditions under which we will accept God—and to spell out attributes that we expect God to bring to the table if he is to win our approval—but, in our better moments, we kneel in God’s presence, acknowledging our debt to God for every breath that we take.*

Perhaps Peter was afraid because, as Preacher Gregory Knox Jones<sup>5</sup> suggests,

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Donovan, “Biblical Commentary.”

<sup>5</sup> Gregaroy Knox Jones, “Following Jesus.”

*Jesus was compelling; his words about God were passionate and promising. Perhaps Peter was afraid because he could feel himself being drawn by the magnetic personality of Jesus. As a fisherman, he would have been a muscular man and an independent soul. He did not labor for anyone else. He decided when to shove his boat out to fish. He decided when to call it a day. He was his own master and didn't answer to anyone else. However, that day when Peter rowed his boat out so that Jesus could stand in it and speak to the crowd, Jesus' wisdom and charisma snagged Peter. And as Jesus reeled him in, Peter could feel himself losing control of his life. And yet, Peter had a choice. He was not under some mystical spell in which his personal freedom evaporated. Jesus did not coerce Peter to follow him; he invited Peter to follow him. Suddenly and without warning, Peter found himself at the most critical crossroad of his life. He could continue with what was comfortable and remain a fisherman, or he could risk it all on the promises of this compelling prophet. He could remain in his own village and keep his same friends, or he could walk away from it all and step into a new future. He could stick with the predictable or he could move into the unknown. Is it any wonder Luke tells us that Peter was afraid? He was scared of making the wrong decision. He could continue his routine and seek out a living or he could shoot the moon. Becoming a follower of this amazing teacher sounded exciting, but what if Jesus' promise of a rich life turned out to be fool's gold?*

Or, perhaps Peter was afraid for another reason. Preacher Chelsey Harmon<sup>6</sup> writes,

*And what does Jesus do? He tells Simon Peter to not be afraid. He tells Peter to not be afraid of what? Of Jesus and his power? Of Simon Peter's own awareness*

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<sup>6</sup> Chelsey Harmon, "Luke 5:1-11 Commentary."

*of his sin—and therefore perhaps his shame? What is clear is that Jesus means to not let anything Simon Peter is thinking stop the man from following after Jesus. As Luke Timothy Johnson points out, Peter tells Jesus to leave him, but in the end, Peter ends up following Jesus. The great and powerful One has enfolded Peter into his own conversion from the moment Jesus asked to use Peter’s boat to teach the crowd.*

*And if Jesus was not concerned about the sinful state of Simon Peter when he got in the boat, he’s not going to let it stop his plans as he steps back on shore. Will we trust and believe that it’s the same—just as true—for us?*

Isn’t it interesting that “the crowd was pressing in on [Jesus] to hear the word of God?” Can you imagine? Pastor Steve Molin<sup>7</sup> observes of this:

*Now, it must have been just after dawn on the shores of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus began to teach the crowds that had assembled. Early in the morning, miles away from the city, the people must have been searching for something that was missing in their lives; searching for acceptance, perhaps, or love, or for a purpose for their lives. Whatever the people were looking for, they must have found it in Jesus’ words, so they followed him wherever he went, and listened to his teaching.*

*People are very much the same today, you know. All week long, we are fed a steady diet of political rhetoric, grim war news and financial scandal. Surely there must be a place where we can go to have our spirits fed and our hopes renewed with Jesus’ words. Seven days without encouragement can make one weak... This is one reason why people come to church.*

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Molin, “Why I Stopped Fishing in a Parking Lot.”

*So Jesus was there on the shore, speaking to hurting folks just like us. And because the crowd was so large, and the people were pressing in on him, he jumped into Simon Peter's boat. How bold of Jesus! Peter knew who Jesus was, but they were not yet friends, and you don't just jump into a guy's fishing boat. Not then, not now. But Jesus needed Peter's boat, so he simply got in and continued to preach.*

Jesus continues to speak to us today. And we continue to come to this place where we can have our spirits fed and our hopes renewed with his words. We come to hear the word of God, and we will not be afraid.

Amen.