

# Put Out Into the Deep: A Journey of Faith

LUKE 5:1-11

Baxter T. Exum (#1360)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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This morning, I would like for us to step back for just a moment to a scene from the life of Peter. Peter, of course, was one of the leading apostles, a man of great faith. And yet, if we know anything about Peter, we know that he was a work in progress. The account I want us to consider today is found in Luke 5 (p. 1604). By the time we get to Luke 5, Peter has already met the Lord. In fact, by this time, Jesus has already healed Peter's mother-in-law. But we also know that Peter was still a commercial fisherman. We know that, Peter was not quite all the way in; he was almost a casual observer. However, in Luke 5, we find that Peter comes to a turning point. In a sense, Peter is on a spiritual journey, and along this path, what happens in Luke 5 is very important.

And what happens in Luke 5 is tied to Peter's work as a fisherman. Now, when many of us think of fishing, we might think of a rod and reel. I think of those few times I went fishing with my grandfather down in Tennessee. Several here this morning love fishing. I have enjoyed eating some of what you have caught through the years. I remember going to Walt and Ann's house for dinner one night, and I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was very good – it was something Walt had caught – there it was on my plate, complete with head, and eyes – this fish was looking right back at me as I ate it, and it was great! That's what I think of when I think of fishing.

We need to realize, though, that Peter was not really fishing for fun. For Peter, this was not something he did on the weekend. This isn't something he did to relax. This isn't something he did on the weekend. On his weekend, he might do anything BUT fishing. But for Peter, fishing was his way of life. Fishing was his job. Peter was a commercial fisherman. And when I think of commercial fishing, I think of those men on the Discovery Network's "Deadliest Catch," those men who live on those boats for several months at a time, as they set those traps for Alaskan King Crab, and then as they come back and check those traps. We don't have cable, so I've only seen the show a few times, but when I think of Peter, I think of some of the men on that show. And speaking of a show called "Deadliest Catch," I'm also reminded that fishing is rather dangerous. In fact, the fatality rate for commercial fishermen is 28 times that of the overall US work-related fatality rate. I bring this up simply as a reminder, because many of us might not appreciate the danger and difficulty involved in fishing for a living. But Peter and the Lord's first followers were commercial fishermen on the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel.

As we begin, I would invite you to keep your place in Luke 5 but turn over to the maps (if you have those in the back of your Bible), to some kind of map of Israel at the time of Jesus. As you might see on your map, the Jordan River starts way up north, it flows down to and through the Sea of Galilee, and then it continues flowing to the Dead Sea in the south, several hundred feet below sea level, where there is no outlet. Once the water gets to the Dead Sea, it evaporates. And that is why the Dead Sea is so salty. The Sea of Galilee, though, up north, is sometimes referred to in the Bible as the Sea of Tiberias and sometimes as the Sea of Gennesaret. It is roughly 13 miles long and 8 miles across, which makes it somewhat smaller than Lake Winnebago (up near Oshkosh and Appleton) here in Wisconsin, and somewhat larger than Lake Mendota here in Madison. From looking at some of the pictures online, some of the surrounding terrain actually reminds me a little bit of the area around Devil's Lake, up near Baraboo, with some very steep hills leading down to the lake. You might remember Jesus casting those demons into a herd of pigs, and those pigs rushed down the hill and over the cliff before drowning in the sea. That happened at the Sea of Galilee. It is located 682 feet below the Mediterranean Sea and is up to 141 feet deep, making it nearly twice as deep as Lake Mendota here in Madison. And as with Mendota, Monona, Waubesa, and Kegonsa, there was somewhat of a very gentle flow to it, as the Jordan River passed through it, similar to the Yahara River here in Madison. With this as background, let's notice what happens as Peter transitions from an observer to more of a follower. We have a snapshot here of a moment of growth in Peter's faith.

Notice, please, Luke 5:1-11,

***<sup>1</sup> Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; <sup>2</sup> and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people 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 and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; <sup>7</sup> so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.***

What we are looking at here is the word of God! And our goal for the next few minutes will be to apply the word of God to our lives today. As we grow in our own faith, what does this passage mean for us?

- I. **As we look at this morning's text, one of the first practical examples we find here is Peter's straight up OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD.**

Just in the first five verses, we find at least three requests made by the Lord, and all three times Peter obeys. He obeys, even though he has every reason NOT to do what Jesus is asking him to do. To put this in context, we have these fishermen who had gotten out of their boats and were washing their nets at the end of a long night of very hard work. These commercial fishermen had been out there fishing all night and had caught nothing. And this is not because of any lack of effort. These were skilled men who knew what they were doing.

These men had practically grown up on this lake. We know from other passages that this was a family business. Their dad was in on it. So, most likely, they have several generations of experience. They know where to go, they know what to do, they know the tricks and the tools, but on this night they had caught absolutely nothing. We can imagine, then, that they were tired – probably somewhat frustrated, maybe disappointed. Over and over again, they have put these nets out and pulled them in again, all night long, with nothing to show for it.

So here they are coming in in the morning, and they are cleaning their nets. I'm assuming they are picking the seaweed out, maybe making some repairs here and there, they're getting everything cleaned up and put away so they can go at it again the following night after they get some rest. And right as they are getting things all wrapped up, Jesus comes along and asks them to put out a little way from the shore so he can teach the people from the boat. That is not too challenging, but then we find that when the Lord has finished speaking, he then says to Simon Peter, ***"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."*** I don't know whether we truly understand what a challenge that must have been for Peter! Here is this commercial fisherman who is being given fishing advice by a carpenter! And yet, looking past that, and maybe out of respect for what Jesus had just done for his mother, Peter obeys. And I love Peter's response, ***"Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as you say and let down the nets."*** What an honest response! What an example for us today!

There are times when we might be challenged with some of what God has told us to do. Maybe what he is telling has not worked in the past, maybe we are tired (as Peter was here), maybe we are discouraged, we might even have some doubts as to what we are being told to do will even work at all, but we learn something from Peter here, and that is: We might not be all in, but based on what we know about the Lord, we obey. We do it, even if there is somewhat of a leap involved. The only reason these men had for going back out was this promise from Jesus, that if they went out and cast their nets one more time, there would be a ***"catch"*** (according to the Lord's statement in verse 4).

In the same way, there are times when we are right on the edge of just being too tired to do what God has said – maybe we have too much going on to practice hospitality as we should. And you know, Peter could understand this. Peter practiced hospitality. We know that because Peter was an elder in the church, and we know that elders must be men who are hospitable. And what is interesting to me is that in 1 Peter, Peter tells us that we must practice hospitality ***"without complaint."*** Why did he say that? He said that because he knew that sometimes he and Mrs. Peter might not have really felt like doing it! And yet, Peter was hospitable anyway. Or, maybe we are too worn out to study or pray, maybe we are too exhausted to encourage a Christian brother or sister, maybe we're having a hard time dealing with a difficult family situation, or maybe I've prayed about something and it didn't work, I've already tried reading the Bible (or whatever) – but then we remember what the Lord has done for us in the past, and like Peter, we give it one more shot. Like Peter, we make the effort. Like Peter, we launch out into the deep, we hear the word of God and obey, even though our obedience might seem to be just a little bit out of reach, even though it might not fully make sense at the time.

And that is what happens here. Even though they are worn out, Peter and his companions put out into the deeper water as the Lord has commanded, and they let down the nets, just as Jesus has told them to do. And that is what faith is: Obedience to the word of God. As Paul will go on to say in Romans 10:17, ***"...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."*** Peter heard the word of Jesus, he trusted what the Lord was telling them to do, and he obeyed. And this is part of Peter's journey. Certainly, Jesus could have just had all of these fish JUMP into Peter's boat. Jesus could have buried Peter in fish, just as God covered the people

in quail back in the book of Numbers. Jesus could have done that here. Instead, though, Peter had to do something. As we sometimes sing, he had to trust and obey. And that obedience was a step, because as we know, over the coming years Peter would be asked to do much greater things, but this was a step in that process as Peter learned to trust Jesus more and more. So, we see the value of obedience to the word of God. Whether it's building an ark, pushing a boat out to sea, or confessing Jesus and being buried with him in baptism, we must always obey the word of God.

II. **There is something else I hope we see in this passage, and that is, this obedience and the miracle that follows causes Peter to WORSHIP JESUS IN ABSOLUTE AWE BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENS HERE.**

They go out into the deep water, they cast the nets, and when they do this, there are so many fish that the nets start to break. They call in the other boat to help, and they start filling up the boats, even to the point that both boats start to sink. Verse 8 tells us that when Peter sees this, he falls down at Jesus' feet in awe, and he says, ***"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"*** We might think to ourselves, "But Peter hadn't murdered anybody. He hadn't robbed or assaulted anybody as far as we know." But then we realize: This event helped Peter see himself for who he really is – face to face with the sinless Son of God. We might think, "We're not that bad!" But then we see Jesus, and we understand just how sinful we really are. And so what starts out as an ordinary day turns into something much greater than either a bad or a good day fishing. This is no longer about the fish. Yes, there is a reward for obedience (and we might get that lesson out of this passage – I thought about making one of our point this morning, "Obey Jesus and Good Things Happen"), but this is no longer about the fish. Instead, what happens here is far beyond what Peter could have ever expected. This is miraculous. The Lord here has once again gone above and beyond the laws of nature. This does not happen, but it happens, and Peter is overwhelmed, worshiping Jesus as ***"Lord."*** He realizes that Jesus is more than a mere man at this point, and so he falls down at Jesus' feet. I was thinking about this early this morning and suddenly realized there are probably TWO miracles here. The text doesn't specifically state it, but it seems to me that the first miracle was Peter not catching a single fish all night long! I can imagine Jesus thinking to himself, "Now, I need to make sure the fish stay far away from Peter tonight, because I need to teach him something tomorrow morning." Maybe, maybe not.

I would emphasize here that this all a part of the Lord's plan, leading Peter along on this journey of faith. Peter has some idea who Jesus is going into this chapter, but this takes it to an entirely new level. Peter has seen other amazing things over the past few weeks, but now he sees that Jesus is Lord even over fishing, and Peter knows fishing. Fishing is Peter's territory. And so, we find that Peter falls down in awe. We certainly think of what happened when Isaiah saw the Lord back in Isaiah 6 as Isaiah goes into the temple and sees this vision of God on his throne, and Isaiah responds the way Peter responds here, ***"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."*** The same thing happens to John in the book of Revelation as John sees the Lord and falls down on his face in worship (Revelation 1:17).

So there is a progression from simple, trusting faith and obedience, to a much deeper understanding of Jesus as Lord, leading to worship. I didn't realize this until I studied for today's lesson, but as far as I can tell, Peter is the first person in the New Testament to address Jesus as ***"Lord,"*** he is the only apostle to fall at Jesus' feet in worship, and he is the only individual anywhere in the Bible to do both. Peter, then, serves as an example in terms of this progression of faith, this journey – he hears the word, he obeys, and he is one of the first to come to realize exactly who Jesus really is.

III. And that leads us to the last few verses of this passage, as we find Peter, James, and John all making a leap into what we might refer to as **TOTAL COMMITMENT**.

They go from moving a boat around to full-fledged disciples of Jesus! And as I see it, it is no coincidence that these three men become three of the Lord's closest friends. So often in the gospel accounts, we read about Peter, James, and John going with Jesus where the others didn't go – into the house where Jairus' daughter was raised, onto the mountain to see the Transfiguration, and even deeper into the garden on the night Jesus was betrayed. It all starts right here – Peter, James, and John! The Lord takes what they are good at (fishing), and he builds on that skill to bring them on board (so to speak) in God's kingdom. ***“Do not fear,”*** Jesus says, ***“from now on you will be catching men.”*** And at this point, these three men bring their boats to land, they leave everything, and they follow Jesus. Jesus' mission becomes their mission. They are not religious scholars. They are not trained in public speaking. They probably can't even read and write at this point. They are not particularly righteous or successful. They are fishermen. But God takes them where they are, gives them opportunities for growth, and these men step up to the challenge. In the same way, God is looking for people today who will LISTEN – he is not looking for people who think they are perfect. REMEMBER: Jesus said he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He is looking for men and women who know they are lost in sin who are willing to trust his word and obey.

Do we need to quit secular work like they did? No. We have examples of many people, including the apostle Paul, who continued making tents while following Jesus. The key is: These men put Jesus first. They did whatever had to be done. Someone has pointed out that the catch of the day here was not the fish, but Peter! The miracle of the fish in many ways was an illustration of what Jesus wanted to do with Peter's life. Jesus wanted Peter to bring in people just like he brought in so many fish that day, and he did. From this day on, Peter leaves what was familiar, and he steps out in faith, knowing that following Jesus will be worth it in the end. We do the same today by trusting God with our future, by trusting God with everything.

For us, trusting God with everything means using our skills and careers in ways that honor God. Trusting God with everything means looking around us for opportunities to jump in and serve, looking for opportunities to teach, opening our homes, getting involved. I've read that just about any kind of church activity turns into outreach when just one person brings a friend – once that friend shows up, we are all fishers of men, and we all help out with the fishing. Fishing for people is our mission as a congregation. It's the reason why we are here. And if we do not understand this, I would invite you to go back to this passage, and I would invite you (as Jesus did to Peter) to ***“put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”*** Yes, it might be uncomfortable, we might be tired, we might have doubts that it will work, but like Peter, our job is to trust and obey. Talk to somebody about the Lord, and let's see what happens. God can take sellers of fabric and turn them into hospitable Christian hosts as he did with Lydia. God can take promising young men and turn them into righteous political leaders as he did with Daniel. God can take highly educated college professors and turn them into skilled missionaries as he did with Paul. God can take medical doctors and turn them into great assets to his kingdom as he did with Dr. Luke. God can take farmers and make them spreaders of truth as he did with Amos. God can take us where we are, and he can do amazing things, if we are willing, if we are willing to trust and obey – he can take us on a journey of faith, turning us into fishers of people as he did with a commercial fisherman like Peter. We can spend the rest of our lives doing nothing but rowing, and pulling in fish, and washing nets, and repeating that process day after day, or in faith we can jump in with Peter and commit our lives to something much greater.

**Conclusion:**

As we close, I want to point out that this journey of faith is not always smooth and easy. It's not a straight line between two points. There are ups and downs along the way. Over the next three years, Peter will grow and mature, but then Jesus is betrayed, Peter denies knowing the Lord three times, and then Jesus is crucified. Peter is at a low point. As we close, I would invite you to turn with me to John 21 (p. 1697). In John 21, Jesus has been crucified, he is back from the dead, and yet there is still some sense of confusion, even shock. Peter rounds up some of the other apostles to go fishing – perhaps as a way to clear their heads, perhaps as a way to try to make sense out of everything that's just happened, as a way to try to sort things out. And instead of asking the Lord to “**go away**” this time, we find that Peter has grown over the past 3-½ years, we find that something quite different takes place. So, as we conclude with this passage in John 21, I want us to pay attention to the similarities between these two accounts, and let's also keep an eye out for how this second account is different – John 21:1-11,

***<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” <sup>6</sup> And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. <sup>7</sup> Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. <sup>9</sup> So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.***

What a journey it has been for Peter! Just a few weeks after this, Peter will go on to preach the first gospel sermon to thousands of people, telling them to repent and be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins.

Today, Jesus is still looking for men and women with Peter's faith, for those who are willing to obey. He's looking for those who are willing to do whatever it takes. The Bible tells us that Jesus died for our sins. To accept his offer of salvation, we must turn away from sin (we must repent), and we must then allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will pull one of the elders aside after the service today. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, we'd be glad to help you with that. You can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)