

FROM NOW ON YOU WILL FISH FOR PEOPLE

Luke 5:1-11

Key Verse: 5:10b

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

One of the famous Yogi Berra quotes is: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." In the course of our lives, we encounter a defining moment when our decision would take us into a new direction. It is very important for us to make a right choice with God's help in such a moment. In today's passage Jesus calls Simon the fisherman to be his disciple. Jesus' calling changed Simon's life. As we mediate on today's Scripture, let us think about how Jesus' calling can change our lives.

I. JESUS TAUGHT THE WORD OF GOD BY THE LAKE (1-3)

Look at verse 1. *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ...* One day, early in the morning, Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, probably praying, as was his custom (5:16; Mk 1:35). This lake appears in the Gospels many times. It had three names: the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. Situated about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee contains fresh water fed by the Jordan River. The surface of the lake is about 700 feet below the Mediterranean Sea. The lake is nearly 13 miles long and 8 miles wide at Magdala, the point of its greatest width. The lake is surrounded, except on the southern side, by steep cliffs and sharply rising mountains. On the east, these mountains rise to the Golan Heights. A few years ago, I had a chance to visit Galilee. It was a special feeling to know that I was walking on the same seashore Jesus walked and riding on a boat in the same lake as Jesus did. This lake remains beautiful forever in our minds, because this is the seashore where Jesus called Simon, and it is where the Risen Christ visited him and served a delicious breakfast for him (Jn 21:12).

Suddenly the morning calm of the lake was disturbed by a crowd of people. Why did many people come to Jesus from early in the morning? Obviously, they came to him for help. Many of them were suffering from various sicknesses and demon-possession. They had heard that Jesus healed many by touching them one by one (4:40). Now a crowd of people came to him, hoping to see him, touch him and hear his word, like many people did during the recent visit of Pope Francis. So what did Jesus do for them? Verse 1 indicates that Jesus taught them the word of God. Jesus knew that they needed to have their problems solved. Their problems were real. When you are sick, it is hard to think about anything else. A splinter in your hand may bother you more than someone else's hernia. But Jesus taught them the word of God first. It is because he wanted them to be healed of their spiritual sickness, to receive the word of life that can solve their problems from the root. That's why Jesus taught the word of God in season and out of season. He taught the word of God early in the morning and late at night. He taught the

word of God in synagogues, in temple courts, in people's homes, at mountainside, and at the lakeside.

How did the crowd respond to his teaching? Verse 1 says that they listened to the word of God. They paid attention to the word of Christ. They had come to Jesus expecting physical healing or some other practical benefits. But when Jesus taught them the word of God, they did not complain. They did not say, "What good is the word of God when I am suffering from this sickness?" Instead, they listened to the word of God. They were thirsty in their souls. Jesus taught them the word of God so that their broken spirits might be healed. Jesus knew that, while physical healing would extend their life on earth a little, the word of God would give them eternal life. The word of God is the only permanent answer to our life problems! The word of God nurtures a person to grow to be a godly person, wise enough to receive salvation, eternal life, and the kingdom of God. St. Paul felt like singing a song of joy when the word of God was in his heart. He said this in his letter to the Colossians: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*" (Col 3:16).

Many young people in our society look good outwardly. They seem fine without the word of God. They don't seem to need Jesus. But we must open our spiritual eyes and see their inner agony. They really need Jesus in their lives. They wonder why they cannot have peace of mind, even when they go to many parties at night. They often feel empty after a night of fun. They need the word of God that can satisfy their thirsty souls. They need the grace of salvation from sin and death through Jesus. We must share the wonderful word of God with all kinds of people, as our Lord Jesus did, believing that the word of God can heal those who are sick and suffering.

As Jesus was preaching the word of God to the crowd, the number of people swelled so large that Jesus was in danger of being pushed into the water. Then Jesus *saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets* (2). One of the fishermen was a man named Simon. Many people were crowding around Jesus, listening to his words, but Simon seemed to be oblivious to the early morning Bible conference at the beach. He continued washing his nets. In Luke 4, we learned that Jesus visited Simon's house and healed his mother-in-law from a high fever (4:38-39). So Simon's demeanor in this passage appears strange to us. He should have been the first person to pay attention to Jesus. But he did not. Perhaps his failure in fishing hardened his heart. Anyway, Jesus approached him first and asked him a favor. Look at verse 3. *He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.* Simon could be no longer indifferent to Jesus. He began to pay attention to the word of God Jesus was preaching. This was the beginning of a wonderful relationship between the Lord and his disciple Simon.

II. "PUT OUT INTO DEEP WATER" (4-7)

Let's see what kind of person Simon was, and how he responded to Jesus' words.

First, Simon was a hardworking man. Simon and his fellow fishermen had worked hard all night but didn't catch any fish (5a). It had been a bad night for them. Now, he was weary and hungry. He could have gone home to eat breakfast and catch some sleep. But he didn't go home. He washed and prepared his nets for a new day's work. He was a hardworking fisherman.

From our Genesis study, we learn that God made man in his own image and blessed him abundantly so that he could work hard to fulfill God's mission. Adam was given the wonderful Garden of Eden to live in and he was expected to take care of the creation as the steward. He had to give each animal a name. To do so, he had to study each one of them and get to know their characters. He was happy when he worked hard for the Lord. Some people wish that they had enough money so that they wouldn't have to work at all. Would this make them happy? Not necessarily. Life is meaningless and empty when there are no meaningful things to do. Simon had potential to become a great servant of God because of his hardworking spirit.

Second, Simon had the “because you say so” faith. Look at verses 4-5. *When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* After his teaching of the word of God to the crowd, Jesus told Simon to put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon was a seasoned fisherman. He knew everything about fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He knew that night time was ideal for fishing and the bright morning sun was already shining on the lake. And humanly speaking, Jesus was a carpenter by trade. But Simon did not say, “What do you know about fishing?” Instead, he answered, *“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* Simon had a great learning mind. This was the quality that enabled him to grow to be one of the greatest servants of God in history.

If Simon remained proud in his mind, insisting on his own knowledge and experience, his life would have remained shallow and unfruitful. His life would have remained only as a fisherman in the Sea of Galilee. But when Jesus said to him, “Put out into deep water,” he was willing to listen to Jesus. Because of his humble learning mind, he came to know Jesus personally. He experienced the deep joy of knowing Jesus personally. Do you feel your life is somehow shallow? Do you want to experience a deep joy in your life? I encourage you to listen to Jesus and follow his words of life. Only Jesus can help us to have deep joy and satisfaction that are independent of our human situations.

Simon said, *“But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* He overcame his own ideas and obeyed Jesus. Obedience is a secret to know Jesus. In John 2, Jesus turned plain water into premium quality wine at a wedding feast. In that miracle, the servants at the banquet obeyed Jesus even though they did not quite understand why they had to fill the huge jars with water when the problem was lack of wine. When they obeyed, however, they found out who Jesus was personally. Obedience is also an expression of one's love for Jesus. John 14:21 says: *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”* A person who loves the Lord can obey

him and obey God's servants. It is not easy to obey Jesus or his servants. But Simon obeyed Jesus. He obeyed Jesus, saying, "because you say so." Obedience is not a matter of intellectual understanding. It is a matter of faith. May God help us to obey his words, saying, "because the Bible (Jesus, God) says so."

There is a book entitled, "The Divine Yes," written by E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973) who was a Methodist missionary to India. He was called the "Billy Graham of India." He wrote this book in his eighties after he had a stroke that left him partially paralyzed. Jones said that, thanks to Christ, he was still the same person after the stroke as before. He said, "Since I can no longer preach a sermon, I must be a sermon." By God's grace, he said Yes to writing the book based on 2 Corinthians 1:20, as his "last will and testament" as his daughter put it. Likewise, God often tells us to do something, through his voice as we study the Bible, through convicting our hearts by his Spirit and through his servant. Many times, we don't quite understand why we have to do what he tells us to do and it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. This is most likely what Simon felt. But when he obeyed Jesus, he experienced who Jesus is and discovered who he is, as we will find out. Let us pray earnestly that we may not resist to do what the Lord tells us. May the Holy Spirit guide our hearts to obey Jesus and experience him personally as Simon did!

What happened when Simon obeyed Jesus? Look at verses 6-7. *When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.* When Simon obeyed, Jesus restored him from his failure. Jesus enabled him to experience a great success. There is no failure in Jesus. Jesus restores all our failures!

III. "FROM NOW ON YOU WILL FISH FOR PEOPLE" (8-11)

Look at verse 8. *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* After seeing the great catch of fish, Simon realized that Jesus was no ordinary carpenter. He saw that even the fish in the sea obeyed Jesus' word. So he fell at Jesus' knees. He called Jesus "Lord" this time, not just a master or rabbi. He said to Jesus, "Go away from me, Lord." He saw God in Jesus. He showed awesome respect for Jesus. He didn't deserve to be near him. The Prophet Isaiah had the same reaction when he met God personally in the temple. "Woe to me!" he 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" (Isa 6:5). Simon's reaction showed that he found God in Jesus. He met God personally on that day. It was an important moment in his life.

In the past, Simon had no understanding of God. He didn't know God. To him, God was someone who was sitting somewhere upstairs, who sent punishment to those who did wrong. He had no personal connection with him. He had no personal relationship with God. As a result, he did not know who he was before God. He just followed the trend of the world like a dead fish flowing down the stream. But after meeting Jesus personally, he could see God in Jesus. And he could see himself before God. The first thing he realized was that he was a sinful man. In the past, he thought

that he was a pretty decent man. Now as he fell at Jesus' knees, all he could say was, "I am a sinful man!"

You might ask, "What kind of sins did Simon commit? Did he cheat on his wife? Did he embezzle any money from the fishermen's association?" I personally think that Simon was a pretty decent man. But he confessed to Jesus that he was a sinful man. Once I watched Billy Graham on TV saying, "I am a sinner" in an interview with a prominent anchorman. Smelling a juicy story, the anchorman tried to get specifics by asking, "What kind of sins have you committed?" To his disappointment, Graham answered, "I often become proud before God, sometimes without realizing it." Admitting our sins before God is a very important first step to establish our relationship with him. It is like going to a doctor and telling we are sick so that we may be healed. But this is not easy, especially for those who live a morally good life. When I first came to Bible study and was told I was a sinner, I protested, saying, "Don't call me a sinner. I have never been to jail." I didn't even know the difference between crime and sin. Crime is violating human law. Sin is violating God's law. And the Bible declares that all of us are sinners. No exceptions. There is no one righteous, not even one (Ro 3:10). So no matter how good a person you may feel you are, you should confess to Jesus, "I am a sinful person," as Simon did. Again this is a very important first step in establishing our love relationship with Jesus. This is the promise from God: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn 1:9).

Simon's repentance and self-realization made Jesus very happy. What did he say to Simon? Let us read verse 10b. *Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."* Jesus told Simon, "Don't be afraid." Kneeling before Jesus, Simon had an awesome awareness of God's presence. How could a sinner be in the same boat with the Holy God? But he didn't have to be afraid. Jesus did not come to punish sinners. He came to save sinners. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid." He was telling Simon that his life was in good hands now that he met the Lord.

Then Jesus said to him, "From now on you will fish for people." What does this mean? Mark 1:17 says: *"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."* When Jesus said, "You will fish for people," he was giving a new life direction to Simon. Jesus said, "from now on" you will fish for people. Up until now, Simon had fished for fish. He lived a selfish and self-centered life of struggling hard as a fisherman in the Sea of Galilee. Without God in his life, he had no purpose and meaning in life; he worked hard because everyone else did the same and because he had to earn a living for himself and his family. From time to time, he was overwhelmed by the emptiness of his life and fear of uncertain future. Especially, when he came home empty-handed after working hard all night, he felt like a total failure. He was a smelly fisherman and his life had no good aroma. But Jesus did not want him to live a selfish, meaningless life any longer. He wanted him to live for the glory of God.

When Jesus said, "From now on you will fish for people," he was giving Simon a holy mission to spread the good news of Jesus to the whole world. Jesus called him to be his disciple. Simon had been chasing after the fish in the sea. Now, Jesus called him to follow him instead as his disciple. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Simon

was to learn from Jesus by following him on a daily basis. He was to listen to Jesus' words, see the miracles he would perform, and learn the great compassion of Jesus for the wandering people. After spending much time with his disciples, Jesus once asked them a question, "Who do you say I am?" Peter immediately answered, "God's Messiah" (Lk 9:20). Through following Jesus as his disciple, Peter was convicted in his heart that Jesus is the Savior who came to save sinful people from their bondage of sin and death.

When Jesus said, "From now on you will fish for people," he called Simon to be a shepherd for God's flock of sheep. Jesus helped his disciples to become good shepherds for God's sheep. Once Jesus wanted to have a quiet retreat with his disciples. But a crowd of people interrupted his plan. They were really demanding people. The disciples felt like chasing them away. But Jesus *had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.* (Mk 6:34). So he told his disciples, "You give them something to eat." Jesus trained the twelve disciples to become compassionate shepherds for God's sheep. Indeed, Peter later became a great shepherd for God's flock of sheep in the early Christian church. He also encouraged other believers: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care." (1Pe 5:2)

As you listen to this message, some of you may say, "These words of Jesus do not apply to me, because I am not a pastor or missionary, and I don't plan to be one." It is true that not everyone can be a pastor or evangelist. But the words of Christ here still apply to all believers. Each one of us can and should fish for people, that is, witness to those who don't know Christ and help them to come and meet Jesus personally. I love to tell the story of Samaritan woman in John 4. She married five men and divorced all of them. Now she was living with a man without marrying to him. Humanly, she was not a good candidate for evangelist. But she became one. After meeting Jesus personally, she went to her townspeople and told all about Jesus. And many of them came to believe in Jesus because of her testimony. If a fisherman or an immoral woman can fish for people, we who are blessed with college education can certainly do it!

What was Simon's response to Jesus' calling? Look at verse 11. *So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.* Simon made a decision of faith to start a new life of faith. He decided to become a fisher of men to take care of God's sheep. He accepted God's high calling by faith. Instead of calculating this and that for his future, he made a decision of faith to follow Jesus. And God blessed his life beyond his imagination. A fisherman from Galilee became St. Peter whose faith in Jesus laid the foundation of the Christian church (Mt 16:18)!

We learned today that Simon met God and found himself before God by obeying the words of Christ. He let down his nets, saying, "Because you say so." Then Jesus invited him to be his disciple. Simon's life was changed forever on that day. May God help us to hear Jesus' voice personally, "From now on you will fish for people"! May God help us to accept his high calling by faith and be good shepherds of God's flock in this generation!