

“Jesus Sought Me” – Luke 5:1-11

Rev. Matt Nieman

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The focus for our worship during these six weeks of Lent is the wandering heart of Simon Peter. In nearly every episode of Jesus’ life that is chronicled in the gospels, Peter is somewhere near him.

Most of the disciples are hardly mentioned by name in the gospels. John, the disciple often referred to as the “beloved disciple,” is mentioned twenty times, as is Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, is mentioned twelve times. Thomas the doubter is mentioned ten times. Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Thaddaeus are mentioned each only three times. Simon Peter, however, is mentioned a whopping 120 times.

Peter is also the leading figure in the book of Acts. Paul recognized Peter as one of the pillars of the church. Two of the New Testament epistles are attributed to Peter. In the centuries following his death, it was Peter who was considered Rome’s first bishop and founding pope.

As prominent as he is in the Bible, Peter is always portrayed as a flawed human—one who seeks to follow Jesus, yet one who is also confused, afraid, and wandering. And as a result, when his faithfulness mattered most, he famously denied knowing Jesus.

Hence, the wandering. Peter’s wandering heart led him to moments of great obedience and times when he abandoned Jesus. Still, he was tethered to the love of God. In fact, Jesus famously declared that upon Peter he would build his church.

His prominence as a follower, therefore, should cause us to consider our own wandering hearts and the devotedness and love God has for us, too, despite our own wandering.

Simon, whom Jesus would later name Peter, was a fisherman.

In first-century Judaism, there was a class of people that went back hundreds of years that were called *am ha’aretz*. The phrase meant “people of the land.” By the time of Simon Peter, it meant people who were poor, uneducated, lower class, and particularly people who were not careful in

their observance of the Law. (*Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple*, Adam Hamilton, 2018)

The Galilee region, which is where we find Jesus, Peter, and the other disciples in this story from Luke today, was known for being home to, and surrounded by, large numbers of Gentiles (non-Jews). It was supposed by some Jews that this fact led Jews in Galilee to be less stringent in their observance of the Law. These fishermen were considered members of this “people of the land.” Generally, they were seen as less educated, being of lower income, and less devout in their keeping of the Law.

At the time, fish was a food staple throughout the Roman Empire. Few people could afford beef or lamb, but they could afford fish. However, that didn’t keep people from complaining about the cost of it. And that led them to complain about fishermen who were catching it and selling it. Fishermen were sometimes denounced as trying to hike the prices of their catch.

So this context sets the tone for our story by the lake today, of Jesus getting into Peter’s boat and instructing him to go deeper where he believed there would be more fish to catch.

Jesus called these people of the land—Peter and the other fishermen—to be his first disciples, not the scribes and Pharisees, and not the well-to-do. And Peter was chief among them.

On this particular day, the guys on the boat had had a bad night. They hadn’t caught much. They were no doubt tired, discouraged, and eager to go home. But they had to wash the nets first. And on this early morning, Jesus sees them, gets in Peter’s boat and asks him to row out a little farther so that he could teach the crowds that had gathered to listen.

Jesus’ strategy was about more than finding the best spot to preach. He wanted to invite Simon Peter’s help. He appealed to Peter’s instinct to help somebody out, the same instinct we all have. And Jesus asking for Peter’s help was his way of building a relationship with him.

Jesus sought Peter out. One of the “people of the land” was who he sought to be his first and most trusted disciple.

More of us than not have Peter traits in us. Far more, in fact. We’re unpolished when it comes to faith, beginners even. We’re not like the

scribes and Pharisees who are always hanging out at church and seeking to develop our theological wisdom. But, we all have gifts—gifts that only Jesus knows at times how they need to be used.

And so like he did Peter, he seeks us—and our gifts—out.

And many times, that seeking of us and finding us comes as a surprise.

John Lennon famously sang, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” And it’s true that God interrupts our lives and what we think is too important to be messed with and issues a call on our lives.

We are reluctant acceptors of that call. Whether it’s our careers or our avocations, it’s hard to think that we have what it takes to undertake the task God places in front of us.

When I was growing up, my family and I were heavily involved in church. And I remembered listening to the preachers in my hometown church and remembering saying to myself, “There is no way I would do that. I respect them, but I’m glad I’ll never be tasked with doing that.”

All these years later, while this work has given my life great meaning and blessing, part of me still can’t believe this is what God had in mind.

But then again, there’s very few givens when it comes to who God calls and for what purpose. Jesus chose a “person of the land” as his first choice, one who according to the culture shouldn’t have been anywhere near the top. And today, Christ hasn’t deviated from his approach. He’s unpredictable, with a rationale for doling out tasks that we just don’t understand at times.

Jesus got Peter’s attention when he asked to use his boat. And then, Jesus does something quite amazing.

Maybe he could tell that he had Peter’s attention—the preaching and the crowds around him perhaps had him captivated. So Jesus then offers some advice that made Peter reluctantly take notice. He told him where to move his boat.

Again, these guys were exhausted from a fruitless lack of fishing overnight. The nets had just been cleaned. And now Jesus tells Peter to take the boat into deeper water.

Peter could've begged off, but he didn't. He has the others get the nets and get in the boat and off they go.

And when those nets are dropped into the deeper water, there's a payoff: a haul of fish so big the nets began to break.

For Peter and these guys, imagine their joy. They needed those fish to make a living. After a night that proved to yield next to nothing, they now had an abundance.

The result of this miracle was greater sustenance for these subsistent workers. But it further enforced to Peter that this guy, Jesus, wasn't ordinary and wasn't kidding about the work he was calling him to. It further got his attention.

It left Peter fearful and feeling unworthy. But Jesus assures him: Don't be afraid—you're now going to fish for people.

What does that mean? And what does that mean today? I'll use a modern-day term that seems to be quite popular: social influencers. Social influencers are those who try to sway or have influence over others in some capacity. Today, the term applies to social media. However, it's a term that also applies to modern-day fishing for people.

In our cases, as in Peter's case, it means exemplifying the qualities of Jesus in a way that helps others to see the love of God and the blessings that come from following this God.

And it's not necessarily the words we speak that have that kind of influence (although the right words and said the right way are certainly useful). It's our actions that play such a key role.

More and more, I meet people who possess faith in Jesus but have elected to not live out that faith in a church context. They've been turned off by religion. I'm sure you know people like this, too. In fact, we all are probably one bad experience in the church away from becoming just like them.

How can we, like Peter was called to, fish for them? How can we influence them in such a way that they can see the benefit of being part of a community that exists for the purpose of leaning on, growing with, and serving with each other in Jesus' name?

That's our challenge. But here's the advantage we have, like Peter had: we're everyday people. We're not the haughty scribes and Pharisees who live in ivory religious towers. We're just like those Jesus calls us to fish for. We've wandered in our faith—like Peter did. We have moments when we're right by Jesus' side, and we have moments when we have denied knowing him—like Peter did.

And yet, like he did to Peter, he does to us every day: He seeks us out. We're tethered to his love forever. And that makes fishing for people a little easier.