

**Luke 5:1-11 Narrative Lectionary 065: Great Catch of Fish**  
**20 Jan. 13**

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I invite you to think about what might be going through Peter’s mind as this story of fishing on the Sea of Galilee unfolds. Peter and his mates are doing what they do best, casting their nets into the sea, hauling out fish, sorting them, preparing them for market, cleaning their nets, maintaining their boat. We don’t know much about Peter, except that he was married (because the Scriptures mention his other-in-law). He and his wife might have had kids; hard to know. But clearly Peter is competent enough and knowledgeable enough to support a family with his fishing business.

Then Jesus shows up. Perhaps Peter had heard of him—Jesus seems to have gained some notoriety pretty quickly—but perhaps not. But plenty of other people had heard of Jesus, and they were curious enough to gather in a large crowd to see what all the fuss was about. There were so many people that Jesus created an impromptu theater by getting into one of Peter’s boats and pushing off just a bit while the crowd gathered on the shore. For all we know, Jesus knew absolutely nothing about boats. He seems to have needed Peter’s help getting the boat off the shore. And there, with Peter sitting beside him in the boat, Jesus did his preaching and teaching.

OK, that’s the scene. Now comes the part I want you to think about. When Jesus is done with his preaching and teaching, he turns to Peter and says, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

Now, how are you going to respond to that? Think about it. How are you going to respond to this guy who taught with authority and power but who may not have known even the first thing about boats or fishing? Well, you could say something like, “Jesus, you’re a great teacher, and there is much truth in what you say. But that doesn’t mean you know anything about fishing. Leave the practical stuff to us professionals, OK?”

That would be a very sensible response. But here’s what Peter actually says: “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” I’m going to say that again, and this time I want you to listen to the emotion behind it. “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

I think Peter’s words foreshadow words of discouragement that are heard today throughout congregations in our country. We have tried and tried, but we are dwindling. We don’t have the people or the money we once did. The culture has turned against us. We’re tired. We don’t really see much of a future, so why try anymore?

Perhaps you have thought some of these things yourself. If so, you would not be the first, and you would have lots of company. Especially now that even with our economy recovering, the church economy continues to suffer. I am aware of one Lutheran congregation in these parts that is \$10,000 in the red—*each month*. And another that incredibly is blowing through \$30,000 a month.

I notice that one of the healthiest congregations around has not replaced its associate pastor because it can't afford it. And you're probably aware of the serious financial difficulty in which our brothers and sisters across the hall find themselves.

We get what Peter was feeling, DO WE NOT? Like Peter, we are greatly tempted to fall into what Martin Luther called one of the greatest of sins: despair. But really, who could blame us?

Not Peter; he felt it, too. But hear again how Peter responded to Jesus: "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. *Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*" Again, I invite you to think about what is going through Peter's mind. What occurs to me is that Peter is thinking, "Here, give me that net and let me prove you wrong." And yet there is faith in Peter's response, even if its grudging. "If you say so, I will let down the nets. Because you say so, Jesus, I will do what you ask, even though I know it will not work."

At least, that's what I imagine Peter thinking. But the thing is, the absolutely important main thing is, that Peter does as Jesus has asked him. The result is a miraculous catch of fish. But to me the far greater miracle is that Peter had the faith to do what Jesus asked. He may not have had the faith to believe it would do any good, but he had the faith to do what Jesus asked. And that was enough. Faith is always a miracle. Community and caring in this church as if we were related to one another is a miracle. Come to think of it, this church and the fact that we're still here is a miracle.

I believe in miracles. The questions I have for us as we get ready to go into our annual meeting and as our new council begins to plan for ministry are these: What is Jesus asking *us* to do? What would it mean for us to cast our nets into the deep water? Do we have enough faith to do so, even if we don't think it will work?

If we do as Jesus asks, I can't say that I know what will happen. I know what will happen if we give into the great sin of despair. That's easy to figure out. But what will happen if we listen hard for the voice of Jesus and do what he asks of us? I'm not sure. But I say, let's find out.