

I don't claim to be an expert in fishing. If you took me noodling in Paul's Valley I wouldn't know the first thing about how to do it or where. If you wanted me to lead you on Lake Hefner or Lake Thunderbird to a good fishing spot I'd only be guessing. Happily in either situation I would yield to someone with experience and knowledge. But if you accompanied me on a boat on Little St. Germain Lake in northern Wisconsin and tried to tell me the best spots to find fish I would question you. I might not be an expert, but in that situation I would expect to know more than you.

Peter was an expert fisherman. His family survived and paid the bills with the fish he pulled out of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Lake of Gennesaret. Few people fishing that lake could give Peter instructions or advice about fishing. The good fishing holes, the best times of day to go out, and techniques to use all came from his years of experience. So when Jesus said, **"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch"** after doing some teaching from Peter's boat it was incredible. Was Jesus, a somewhat experienced carpenter by trade from his step-father, really giving Peter instruction on fishing?

Jesus wasn't claiming expertise in fishing these waters. Peter and his associates had listened to Jesus speaking. He didn't speak about literal fishing on the lake. Jesus wasn't conducting a seminar on tools and tips to catch more fish. Jesus spoke and preached the Word of God. He told people and Peter too what they needed to hear about their relationship with God. And when he finished he gave the fishermen a lesson on their future.

"Drop your nets and you'll catch fish." So simple. Yet experienced fishermen knew you can't just drop nets any time and expect a catch. In fact Peter would have many reasons not to listen to Jesus. They had already fished all night and were tired. The nets needed fixing, restretching, and prepping. And experienced fishermen knew that the middle of a hot day with the sun shining brightly is not the time for fishing. Even with all his fishing experience Peter was moved to respond, **"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."** Everything said don't, experience told him not to, but Jesus told him to and that was enough for Peter.

I just returned from a pastor teacher layperson conference on Thursday and Friday. The theme was *It's our time*. Highlighted was that it's our time to study God's Word and our time to take that study and share it. Sounds simple like **"let down the nets"**. It's our time to go fishing with God's Word to see what people God will bring in for the catch. But you know as well as I that there are all sorts of reasons we have as individuals and as a congregation not to. We talked about them at this conference too. Turns out other congregations and other people just like you wrestle with reasons to skip fishing. It doesn't seem like our time right now. There are internal issues we need to fix first. I don't know enough to talk to someone. I'm not outgoing. Others are better and more extroverted. Christianity has a bad name because of others. How can we overcome that? We're here, we've been here, no one is taking us up on the invitations. Every good fisherman sees these for what they are. Christians do too. They're excuses. God calls them sinful.

Jesus answered every excuse in Peter's mind. He did so before he performed the miracle. What was it that made Peter say yes when everything told him no? **"Because you say so."** Jesus spoke his Word and Peter believed. Then Jesus gave Peter something to back it up. He demonstrated complete control over the physical world. He brought in so many fish Peter alone couldn't bring in the nets. It was a demonstration of power and grace. Christ Jesus supplied the power and grace and didn't disappoint. Visibly Peter could see how much Jesus loved him. The love of Jesus was very real. Jesus loved Peter and moved heaven and earth...and fish...to prove it.

So you and I have reasons, excuses really, to avoid fishing. In our minds we set ourselves up as the experts in going after lost souls. But Jesus steps into our lives and answers every excuse with his love. He picks off the excuses one at a time, answering each with his perfection. Jesus had reasons to find excuses to hesitate and linger. He knew what was coming. Yet Jesus offered none. He stepped up and faced the worst. He demonstrated his love for us on the cross. His love for us fills us up full, really to overflowing. Jesus takes away our sinful excuses and gives us confidence and trust in his love. Jesus continues to demonstrate perfect control over all things for our benefit. In the life of our congregation he provides his Word and sacraments. These means of grace are the record of his love and the way in which we connect to his love by experience.

Full nets, full boats, and a stunning catch of fish that was totally unexpected. **"When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man!"** Suddenly it wasn't about fish. Peter realized he stood before God come to live in human flesh and he knew he wasn't worthy as a sinner to be in the presence of God. Peter had sins that separated him from God. Jesus standing in his boat, giving him blessings, and showing his power was too much for a sinful man to accept.

We started worship this morning with confession of sins. We stood before God and admitted we don't measure up, we don't belong. We don't deserve and aren't worthy enough to be here this morning before him. He's provided blessings in the form of a job, financial resources, and abilities we didn't earn. As a congregation we own this building, we have volunteers, strong financial offerings, and many more that we don't deserve. The God of the universe showers you and me with gifts beyond number. Can you confidently say you've thanked God enough? What haven't you become jealous that someone else had? Which blessings haven't you wished were more abundant? You and I know we don't deserve one thing the Lord has given to us. We are sinful men, women, and children. So sinful it's why we start worship with confession. Like Peter we should tell the Lord to leave us because we're sinful.

Jesus didn't leave Peter's boat. Jesus doesn't leave our presence either. He's still here. He's here because of his promises. **Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.** After confession of sins comes forgiveness of sins. I announced what God did so you don't have to be afraid. God provided his son as our Savior. Jesus got rid of our sins. We need what only Jesus can do. We survive based on what he provides. Forgiveness for countless sins allows us to trust God's love and not be afraid. We have no reasons to run in fear of the Lord. No reasons to cower and beg for him to leave us. Our sins are gone and so is our fear.

Peter and his associates were recruited for a task by Jesus. From now on brothers and sisters you have been recruited too. By grace you are recruited to be fishermen. Not fish. Fishers of men. Recruited by Jesus to be people fishing for people who need rescue from sin, death, and hell. Fishing for people by sharing the message of eternal life in Christ. Don't be afraid. You know how. Jesus provides the message of his Word. He empowers you, instructs, gives you the tools, and energizes you to throw the net of the gospel into the water of the world. Just as he provided the catch for Peter he'll provide a catch for you. By grace God will lead you right to the lives of people who need what you have. God will prepare their hearts to ask questions. Or they'll be open to your invite. Or they'll show up at our door. Or we as a congregation will contact them through a new mover visit, VBS, or Christmas and Easter. God will give you the opportunities. It might be out of your comfort zone, but don't be afraid. It might be beyond what you think you can do, don't be afraid. Your Savior rescued you from your sins and an eternity in hell. Don't be afraid because it is his power, his love, his message, and everything that comes from him. That will allow you to be a person fishing for people.

Turned out Jesus was an expert on fishing. Miraculously bringing fish into Peter's nets. But also miraculously giving Peter the task of bringing people into his kingdom. Jesus miraculously rescued you and miraculously calls you to action. God alone knows who and where and when. We might not be the experts, but God is. He will strengthen, empower, and bless you and me with opportunities to share the gospel. We've been recruited to be fishermen. To share the gospel to win more for God by his grace and through his Word.