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Series: Wandering Hearts: Figuring Out Faith with Peter

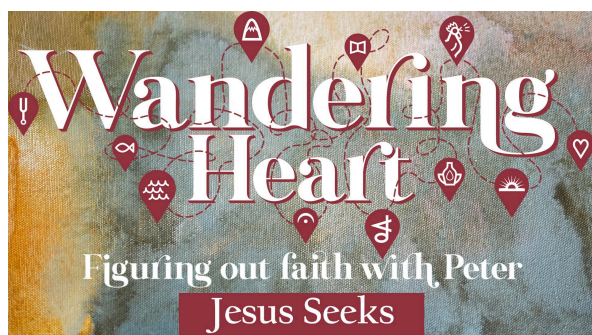
Sermon Title: Jesus Seeks

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

Text: [Luke 5:1-11](#)

Email: [Ryan Hazen](#)

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Today, we're beginning a series that will lead us to Easter. If you're not that familiar with the church calendar, today is the first Sunday in the season of Lent. Lent began on Ash Wednesday—last Wednesday—and will take us to Easter. The word "Lent" comes from the Old English "lencten," which means "lengthen" as in "lengthening of the day." Our days are getting longer—it is Lent. The shortest day of the year was the winter solstice on December 21 and the days have been getting a little longer ever since. However, we really start to notice it about now. It was only a couple of weeks ago that it was a big deal that it stayed light past 6 pm. Tonight, sunset is 6:23 pm.

Throughout this season and this series, we will follow the most famous, and the most outspoken, of the disciples—Peter—as he tries to figure out his faith. We're following him in this season because Peter's story is one of the great stories of a changed life in the Bible. Peter was originally named Simon. Jesus was the one who changed his name from Simon to Peter. I saw a great cartoon recently. In the top box, Simon is at the printer picking up an order and the person at the desk says, "Here's your order, Sir. A thousand business cards saying, 'Simon, the fisherman.'" Then, later that day, Jesus is shown calling Simon as a disciple saying, "Simon! From now on you will be known as Peter!"¹

Peter means "rock." He was a Galilean fisherman and was the brother of Andrew. The brothers came from the village of Bethsaida. Peter was married. We know that because back in chapter 4, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. He was also a follower of John the Baptist. Fishermen at that time were gruff and unkempt. They were full of vigor and had boisterous tempers. This is perhaps why James and his brother John were called the Sons of Thunder. Fishing was a physically demanding job. They must have been somewhat fearless, too, because some of the storms that came quickly upon the Sea of Galilee were fierce. They often caught the fishermen by surprise and could easily capsize the 20- to 30-foot boats they used.

¹ <https://www.courageouschristianfather.com/name-change-comic/#axzz8RuW0QZCx>

Peter was among the first disciples called by Jesus, and he was frequently their spokesperson—for better or worse. Even when Peter felt unworthy to be in Jesus’ presence, Jesus did not hesitate and told Peter and Andrew that they would be catching people. Peter was bold but oftentimes wrong. Once he rebuked Jesus and said that he was willing to die for Jesus. But, at the arrest and trial of Jesus, Peter denied even knowing him—THREE TIMES! When someone in our household seems to get too cocky, too confident—we have a saying that they are “often wrong, never in doubt.” In some ways, that could describe Peter.

Peter has this wandering heart.² His faith journey is not polished or linear or perfect, and he many times will talk before engaging his brain. We saw that last week on the mountain in the story of the transfiguration. But Peter is always tethered to the love of God. By following Peter’s journey in this series, we’ll see the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a human trying to figure it all out and maybe that will teach us something as well.

Today’s story begins when Jesus needs a pulpit and commandeers Simon’s boat to use. By using a boat as a pulpit, Jesus is able to get a little way out from the crowd to teach them much like I am to you. If I were standing right in the middle of the center aisle to preach, many wouldn’t be able to see or hear—and many would probably be OK with that. The other trick that Jesus has learned is that the water provides better acoustics than being on land. In these days before fancy PA systems, getting out a bit on the water allowed the sound to bounce off the water so people could better hear what Jesus had to say.

After the teaching, Jesus tells Simon to push the boat out to deeper water and let down the nets for a catch of fish. Simon and the crew had been fishing all night with no success, then working from the early morning hours cleaning the nets. Most likely they were exhausted and looking forward to going home and getting some sleep. You can almost hear the exasperation in Simon’s voice in his reply to Jesus, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). Simon obviously believes this will be a futile exercise. He is the professional fisherman, after all.

We know what happens next —nets so full of fish that they begin to break, boats so full of fish that they begin to sink. So many fish that they have to signal their partners in other boats to come and help. This had to be very exciting. I remember not caring much for fishing when I was young, likely because I was told that I had to be quiet and not scare the fish. My family owned a boat up until I was probably six or seven years old. I remember my dad letting me go out with them fishing one night in the boat on Pomona Lake. We hit just the right place and pulled in something like 40 nice sized Crappie that night. It is an exhilarating rush to pull in the fish—not as exhilarating for me to clean them.

Seeing what is happening on his boat, Simon is overwhelmed with fear and wonder because he senses that he is in the presence of divine power. He responds by falling down at Jesus’ knees and begging him, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8b). Simon is caught by surprise. In the midst of his ordinary daily grind, and after a particularly lousy night at work, he encounters one who changes everything. Amazed by the power of God displayed in the abundant catch of fish, Simon is immediately aware of his sinfulness. He sees the overwhelming disparity between God’s power on display before him in Jesus and his own mortal, compromised life. Jesus responds to Simon by saying, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people” (Luke 5:10).

² Series plan *Wandering Heart: Figuring Out Faith with Peter*, purchased from A Sanctified Art, <https://sanctifiedart.org/>

Although they have just brought in the greatest catch of their fishing careers, Simon Peter, James, and John leave those boatloads of fish behind and follow Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus has completely reoriented their lives. It always strikes me in the calling of these fishermen that God calls ordinary people to discipleship and mission. There is nothing the slightest bit extraordinary about Simon Peter and his fishing partners. They are simple fishermen, and they are simply doing what they did every day. They are minding their own business, cleaning their nets after a long, discouraging night of work, when Jesus comes along, enters into their utterly normal, mundane lives, and changes everything.

Jesus calls Simon and his partners as they are. Simon is acutely aware of his unworthiness, but Jesus is not put off by this in the slightest. Jesus does not ask Simon to get his act together, his resume prepared, and then come back for an interview. Rather, Jesus encounters him as he is, tells him not to be afraid, and calls him to a new mission of catching people. Throughout scripture we see that human sin, failure, and inadequacy are not obstacles to God's call. God calls imperfect people to do God's work, people who are aware of their unworthiness and are often doubting and resistant to God's call. God doesn't wait for them to shape up. God calls them as they are and then works on shaping them into faithful servants. It's the old saying, "God doesn't call the qualified; God qualifies the called."

Simon Peter's resistance to Jesus stems not only from his sense of unworthiness. He initially protests Jesus' instructions to go out into the deep waters and let down the nets because he is convinced that the fish are not biting. They have worked all night and caught nothing. We can hardly blame him for his skepticism. How often do we resist Jesus' claim on our lives because what he is calling us to do seems too crazy, too impractical? How often do we avoid putting out into the deep waters of following and bearing witness to Jesus because we are convinced that we will not see any results? What might it mean for us to go deep-sea fishing with Jesus—to trust and follow him outside our comfort zones, to let go of our certainties, to have our lives radically reoriented?³

For most of us, this will not mean leaving our current professions behind (although we cannot rule out that possibility). We all are called by virtue of our baptism to participate in God's mission to the world in Jesus Christ. We all are called daily to reorient our priorities to align with God's priorities, to use the gifts God has given us in service to others, to share the good news of Christ in word and deed.

Jesus' mission does not wait until we think we are ready. The need for the gospel in this broken world is far too urgent. We are called right now, in spite of our frailty, failures, and doubts, even in the midst of ordinary, busy, complicated lives. Jesus' word to Simon Peter is also a word to us: "Do not be afraid." This is Jesus' mission, and we trust that he will keep working with us and through us, "catching" others as he has caught us—in the deep, wide net of God's mercy and love. We trust that the catch is in God's hands and not ours and that God's desire is for the nets to be bursting and the boats to be full.

There's another thing about deep water. If we think of our spiritual lives, our souls, as this water, we can find many ways to think about this text. Shallow waters are safe places in our lives and in our hearts, where we can put our feet on the ground and keep our heads well above water, and where everything that is there is easily visible to the eyes. The deep water—there is so much there that you might never see or know it all, and you can't touch bottom, and you have to work harder to stay afloat, but some of

³ Helpful commentary used for this sermon found at:

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/great-catch-of-fish-2/commentary-on-luke-5-1-11>

the most fascinating things are found in the deep water, and you have to be a strong swimmer or a strong boater or with someone who is strong enough for both of you, to spend a lot of time in the deep waters.

You can spend all your time in shallow water, but most swimmers aren't satisfied with that. If you are in scouting in our troop based at Geist Christian Church or any troop for that matter and want to do any water related activity at summer camp at Ransburg, you must pass a swimmer's test either before going or on the first day of camp. Ransburg is situated on Lake Monroe so there are LOTS of water activities from swimming and canoeing to small boat sailing and water skiing and scouts want to participate. The swim test is to: "Jump feet first into water over the head in depth. Level off and swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating."⁴

Sure, it is work, but the reward on out in the deeper water is great. Where are we spending our time in the waters of our soul? I think it is astonishingly easy to spend all our time, all our lives, in what God would consider the shallow waters. Not taking risks. Not digging deep. Not exploring the unknown. Keeping our feet firmly planted, never heading out to the deep where we'd have to rely on having Jesus with us to make it through.

I can tell you that I'm generally not a risk-taker. Spiritually, I wonder if I have any more sense of adventure. How easy it is to do the bare minimum instead of giving heart and soul to God. It is easy, sometimes, for me to understand exactly what the scripture is saying, what Jesus is asking, and somehow easier to make a list of reasons why I can't quite do what is required. I want us to think of ourselves as invitational people—thinking about the invitations God extends to us and the invitations we extend to others. God's invitation to us today is to explore the deep waters of our faith. When I think about the dreams for Geist Christian Church that I have, a big part of that is being fruitful and prayerful and invitational and missional.

When I think about us being invitational, I'm not necessarily talking about attending an event with a start time and an end time, although that would be fine, too. I'm talking about inviting people into a relationship that will change their lives—even as we ourselves again and again say "Yes" as God calls us to let down our nets one more time. "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."

⁴ <https://www.aquaticscamp.org/BSASwimmerTest>