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Title: Leaving Things Behind

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

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Between now and the beginning of the church season of Lent – these four Sundays of February - we'll be following the lectionary readings of the gospel. The lectionary is a three-year cycle of readings used by churches throughout the world to guide study, preaching, and meditation on the scriptures. Each year will focus on one of the synoptic

gospels – Matthew, Mark, or Luke. We are in "Year C" so the focus is on the third of the three synoptics – the gospel of Luke. We'll spend our time in Luke considering the ministry of Jesus in these four weeks.

We're meeting up with Jesus this morning in chapter five. Luke spent the first chapter introducing us to John the Baptist's parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah. We met Mary and Joseph and heard Mary and Zechariah sing praises to God for what God was about to do. The second chapter – we know it well, we hear it on Christmas Eve - is all about the birth of Jesus. It also has his presentation in the temple – where Anna and Simeon recognize him as Messiah – and what little we know about Jesus' childhood. There's that story of Jesus hanging out with the scribes and teachers while his parents head home to Nazareth.

Chapter three brings us back to John the Baptist, but now he and Jesus are grown men. John baptizes Jesus and moves into the background. He knows that it's time for him to become less so Jesus can become more. The fourth chapter took us into the wilderness of temptation, and back home to Nazareth to hear Jesus preach his first sermon in the synagogue there. It begins well, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, but it ends up with the people of Nazareth trying to throw Jesus off a cliff. Don't get any ideas! Jesus passes through their midst and gets away. ¹

Jesus mentioned to the people of Nazareth that he's already been at work, over in Capernaum, and other parts of Galilee. Since Capernaum wasn't a very big village, it's a pretty good guess that Jesus already knows many of the people who live there. People like Simon and his brother Andrew, and their partners in business, the sons of Zebedee. Good, sturdy fishermen. By

the time we get to today's reading, Jesus has already been to Simon's house and has healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. It's the Sabbath, but no one questions these acts of healing. Instead, as soon as Sabbath ends at sundown, people come from everywhere, bringing their sick to Jesus.

Maybe it's because of their prior connections that Simon doesn't seem surprised when Jesus shows up on the beach one morning. They are already friends. Luke's story of Jesus calling the first disciples is unique among the synoptic Gospels. While Mark and Matthew speak of Jesus walking along the Sea of Galilee and abruptly calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him, only Luke tells the story of a miraculous catch of fish preceding the call. By the way, lest there be confusion, the lake of Gennesaret and Sea of Galilee is the same body of water.

If you think this story sounds familiar from someplace else, you'd be correct. Luke's story shares common elements with John's post-resurrection story of Jesus meeting his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. The first part of John 21 tells of a non-productive night of fishing, Jesus offering some unsolicited fishing advice, an overwhelming catch of fish, and a recognition of Jesus' identity that focuses especially on the response of Simon Peter.

In Luke's Gospel, Simon had been fishing all night with no success, then working from the early morning hours cleaning his nets. Most likely he was exhausted and looking forward to going home and getting some sleep. It must have seemed a bit of an imposition when Jesus got into Simon's boat and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Nevertheless, Simon did what Jesus asked. Jesus' teaching from the boat would have allowed him to be away from the crush of the people and would have been acoustically in the days before loudspeaker public address systems.

Luke does not tell us what Jesus taught the crowds that morning. The focus is on what follows. Jesus tells Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon believes this will be a futile exercise. He is the professional fisherman, after all. We can almost hear the exasperation in his voice when he responds, "Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing." But then he continues; "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:4-5).

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. Seeing what is happening, Simon is overwhelmed with fear and wonder, sensing that he is in the presence of divine power. He responds by falling at Jesus' knees and begging him, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8)

Simon is caught by surprise. During his ordinary daily grind, and, after a particularly lousy night at work, he is encountered by one who changes everything. Amazed by the power of God displayed in the abundant catch of fish, Simon is immediately aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness. He sees the overwhelming disparity between God's power on display in Jesus and his struggles – at fishing and perhaps, in life.

Jesus responds to Simon by saying, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people” (Luke 5:10). The Greek word for “catching” used here is *zogron*. It is rarely used in the New Testament but means “to catch alive.” Of course, fishing with nets was a matter of catching fish alive, but those live fish would soon be dead. Here Jesus calls Simon and his partners to a new vocation of catching people so that they might live, a life-giving vocation of being caught up in God’s mission of salvation for all.

The response of these three is astonishing. Although they have just brought in the greatest catch of their fishing careers, Simon Peter, James, and John leave not only their capital assets – their boats and nets – but something I hadn't thought about until I read it again this week – they left those boatloads of fish behind and follow Jesus. “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.” (Luke 1:11). Their encounter with Jesus has completely reoriented their lives.

This last verse has haunted me – “they left everything and followed him.” Leaving just some things is tough for us but everything. I don’t know that any of us could do that. When I accepted the position on staff at Geist Christian Church in 2006, Ruth and I were living in Columbus, Indiana. We lived in a lovely four-bedroom home on North Riverside Drive – a home that we had purchased shortly after having children – a home that we thought would serve us well to and into retirement. I think when we make plans like that, God just has a hearty laugh.

As people do when preparing to move, we had a moving company representative come to the house and give us an estimate on what it would cost to transport our stuff from Columbus to the northeast side of Indianapolis. After we had been to the upstairs and the main level, we started down the steps to the basement. As we hit the landing, Mr. Moving Company turns to Ruth and says, “Mrs. Hazen, you have quite enough stuff.” How he knew that all of it was hers and none of it was mine, I don't know but it was a quote that has stuck with us throughout our marriage as we seem to accumulate more and more stuff.

When we moved we didn't get rid of much – ok – we didn’t get rid of anything. We even moved two full five-gallon jugs of water that we kept in

the basement in case the water to the house went out. I guess we didn't know if our new house would have running water. Now, we are beginning to think about downsizing. We won't move far, we just don't need the size of house we needed when we moved here 16 years ago. But the sticking point at the moment seems to be what to leave behind. Of course, we wouldn't just leave stuff in the house - we'd sell it, give to our kids what they want, give it away - but even leaving some stuff behind is hard. Can you imagine Simon, James, and John? - "they left everything and followed him."

I wouldn't get far this morning if I suggested you just leave everything you own to follow Jesus. So, what might it mean for us in 2022 to leave things behind to follow Jesus? The story gives us some clues.

1. What if we left behind thoughts that we might not be up to the task or that we might not have anything to offer? Jesus calls Simon and his partners as they are. Simon is acutely aware of his unworthiness, but Jesus is not put off by it in the slightest. Jesus does not ask Simon to first get his act together, get 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. So... -

1. - Leave behind your thoughts of inadequacy.

2. What if we leave behind preconceived notions about what will work and what won't work to reach people? Simon 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? Number two - leave behind preconceived notions about what will work and won't work to reach people for Christ.

3. What if we didn't wait to follow Jesus until we were ready? Jesus' mission does not wait until we think we are ready. The need for the gospel in this world is far too urgent. We are called right now — even during our ordinary, busy, complicated lives. Jesus' word to Simon Peter is also a word to us - "Do not be afraid." This is Jesus' mission – not our 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, finally, that the catch is in God's hands, and that God's desire is for the nets to be bursting and the boats full.

Leaving things behind can be unsettling. They take with them a sense of the security that we allotted to them while they were around. To leave behind the familiar is a painful act. You're leaving behind things you knew and things that made up your world. Things that anchored you even though you outgrew them. And the emptiness that greets you once those things are gone is scary. But you are following Jesus. Jesus is why you've left behind those thoughts that you might not be good enough or up to the task. Say yes and let God work. Jesus is why you've left behind the preconceived notions of what will work and what won't. Say yes and let God work. Jesus is why you don't wait until the stars align and you have enough money or feel better or the kids are raised or – or – or. Say yes and let God work.

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 the 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. Happy fishing.²

¹ Summary work found at www.pastorsings.com, Heading Into Deep Water – sermon on Luke 5:1-11 for Epiphany 5C, February 6, 2022 by Jo Anne Taylor.

² Note – some of the commentary assistance in this sermon from www.workingpreacher.org, Commentary on Luke 5:1-11 by Ronald J. Allen (my preaching professor at Christian Theological Seminary), February 10, 2019.