

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and **the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God**, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

What Is Everything?

By now most of you have probably memorized the mission statement that we recite at the end of every worship service - *To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. It’s not a bad mission statement, but it sounds a little too Spartan. Too harsh. It sounds too much like the ending of the pep talks I used to hear when I was a salesman: the manager would tell us to “Go out and SELL SELL SELL!” It sounds like we’re all about getting more people to join us, and don’t get me wrong; I fully believe that more people *should* be disciples of Jesus. But our focus should not be on selling our beliefs or getting people to join our church; our focus should be on nurturing love within us and between us so that we can disperse it around us. If we are truly loving people we aren’t concerned about how many people join our ranks; if we are truly loving people we simply need to let the light of God shine from us naturally and people will naturally be drawn to that light. Evangelism should never be forced or contrived; evangelism is simply the love of God flowing naturally in and through your words and deeds which will of course draw many people to Christ and to discipleship. The outreach work that we do through the church is simply our transmission of God’s love to those around us, and when our words and deeds convey the love of God the people will come as they came to Jesus in today’s Gospel reading.

But we don’t usually think of being a disciple and maturing in love as the same thing. We usually think of discipleship in terms of tasks we should perform. Remember the rich young man who came to Jesus and said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” He says that he has fulfilled all the tasks – obeyed the commandments, honored his parents, remembered the Sabbath...and Jesus gives him one further task to perform; go sell his

possessions, give the money to the poor and come follow him. The rich young man is thinking that if he completes these various tasks on the list that Jesus give him that he will qualify for eternal life. And I think that Jesus gives him that final task not as a specific requirement for attaining eternal life but to draw attention to a flawed way of thinking. Being a disciple is not a twelve step program. It's not a grocery list of accomplishments that designate you a disciple. **It's nurturing a heart of love that leads us to follow Jesus and love one another.** Simon and the other fishermen leaving **everything** behind to follow Jesus not because it was one of the requirements of discipleship; it was the natural response of a heart wanted to change. We read this passage and we wonder what "everything" means; are we supposed to quit our jobs and become pastors? Are we supposed to sell all our possessions and give the money to the poor? What is everything?

Ultimately everything is anything that gets in the way of your following Jesus. For Simon, it was his more than his boat; it was his way of thinking, his way of acting, and his pride. In our reading today Jesus commandeers a boat that belongs to Simon and instructs Simon to take him a little ways off shore so he could preach to the crowd that was gathered on the shore. We're not told whether Simon listened to the sermon or just simply trying to accommodate this preacher who has drawn such a crowd. We do sense that Simon did not have the greatest of faith in Jesus because when Jesus tells him to put out a little ways and let down the nets for a catch Simon rather politely points out that he has been out all night (the time when fish are normally caught), and they have caught nothing. What do you suppose are the chances of him catching any fish during the day? Yes, Simon is a proud fisherman who obviously knows how to fish better than Jesus does. But to satisfy this preacher he'll indulge him. He'll take the boat out a ways and let down the nets, and when those nets come up empty Simon will have every excuse to NOT leave his boat and follow this crazy preacher who know nothing about fishing.

But that's not what happens. When the nets are dropped they *do* catch fish, so many in fact that the nets are bursting and Simon's boat is weighed down to the brink of swamping. In light of what is happening Simon cannot be cynical anymore and knows that he may in fact be in the presence of someone holy, someone righteous and godly, and his awareness of this presence makes him thoroughly uncomfortable, which is why he falls down at Jesus' knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" That is the way a lot of people feel about the church; I've heard people say, "I'm not good enough to go to church." What that really means is that they don't believe in a God that can forgive, pardon, wipe the slate clean. It's best for them to remain apart from God because they are beyond redemption. Yet this insistence on being unredeemable is another expression of human pride – the belief that OUR sins MUST remain OUR burden and no one else's. Right now I'd like to show you a clip about coming to grips with our pride, with our sin, a clip that I think shows how discipleship begins. It's from the 1986 film called *The Mission* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYTRQAY2o4E>). First let me give you some background. Rodrigo Mendoza (played by Robert De Niro) is a slave

trader in South America in the 1740s. He kidnaps native peoples (known as Guarani), killing some in the process, then sells those he captures as slaves to the Portuguese colonists. Rodrigo is known by the Guarani and feared by the Guarani. Rodrigo's fiancé confesses to him that she is in love with his brother Philippe, and Rodrigo kills Philippe in a duel. Although Rodrigo is acquitted, he is nonetheless racked with guilt over his sin. A Jesuit priest, played by Jeremy Irons, visits him, but Rodrigo tells the priest to go away in the same way that Simon tells Jesus to go away in today's lesson. But the priest challenges Rodrigo to undertake a suitable penance for his sin. He is to carry a large bundle of swords and shield and armor up a steep cliff, up to the village of the Guarani people, the very people he has been killing and kidnapping and forcing into slavery. Rodrigo agrees to the challenge though he does not believe that anything or anyone can relieve him of his guilt or his shame. As he's climbing this steep cliff with the bundle of armor, another priest attempts to help him, but Rodrigo insists on carrying his own burden. Let's watch.

Some people simply cannot leave behind the weight of their own guilt, and they carry it around until it nearly kills them. What this clip depicts is God's ability to free us from the weight of that shame and guilt. It's completely appropriate that Rodrigo was freed from his penance by the people he had once exploited, the people he had once looked down upon as weak and stupid, the people he had enslaved, the people who had the greatest reason to hate him and the people from whom he needed forgiveness the most.

What is it that we are called to leave behind? Everything that causes us to stand apart from God and apart from one another, everything that makes us think that we are better or smarter or more special than others, including the idea that we are beyond God's ability to redeem. We need to give ourselves to the God who has the power to free us from every sort of bondage. Yet if we desire to be completely redeemed we must leave behind *everything* and give ourselves to God completely.