

## **“We are Called to Follow”**

**Luke 5:1-11**

*Preached by Rev. Don Childers at The United Church of Los Alamos  
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Some time back I “googled” the town that I spent my elementary and junior high years in, Junction City, Oregon. It was an interesting journey back in time. One archive had some “old” photos from 1960. After I got over the personal displeasure that a photo from 1960 was an **OLD PHOTO**, I recognized some of the stores in the photo. That exploration brought back some memories. One memory was the times that I would ride along with my Dad as he delivered auto parts in Junction City and to the surrounding area.

Junction City was and is a farm community. At the time we lived there it had a population of about 1600. Today the population has topped 4,000! The surrounding towns were much smaller than that. My dad would deliver auto parts to some very out of the way places. I remember some of the crusty, grease-covered mechanics that he dealt with. They were rough on the outside but very often gentle on the inside. Very often they would employ what I would call “poetic” language to help them along in their task. Sitting on my chair, drinking my coca-cola that I had pulled out of the icy water in what is now considered an antique soda pop case; I listened and took it all in. I can remember such poetry erupting from these mechanics especially after certain persons—such as doctors or lawyers or teachers or the town leader---left the garage. In most cases it was because the customer had tried to tell the mechanic how to do his business. I learned that it is usually not wise to tell someone how to do their business especially if your business is totally unrelated to their business.

I think of these memories when I read passages such as this one in the Gospel of Luke.

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Jesus went from his first disastrous sermon in his hometown to doing some remarkable things. He healed people and many people responded to his teaching. One day, Luke tells us, Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret. The crowds had really grown by this time. Jesus climbed into a boat and began to teach.

After he finished his sermon a strange thing happened. The carpenter-turned-preacher tried to tell some crusty fishermen how to do their business! Jesus was a carpenter by trade. Now in that day and time one could not go to Metzger's or Home Depot to get needed supplies. Carpenters were involved in all aspects of the trade including cutting down the tree, stripping the bark from the tree, sawing the tree up into lumber, and then building whatever someone wanted to be built. The carpenter of that day and time was more like a lumberjack-carpenter.

Yet a lumberjack-carpenter was different from a fisherperson-processor. Jesus could look at a tree, size up how much wood it would produce, know the hardness or softness of the wood, and know what the wood was best suited for. Fishing, however, was a very different profession. Yet, Jesus, the carpenter-preacher tells the fishermen how to fish. It is a wonder he survived! It is a wonder that they did not throw him into the lake!

Even more than that Jesus did not tell them how to fish BEFORE they went fishing but like the Monday-morning Quarterback, Jesus told them how to fish **after** they had returned from a gut retching night of fishing! Here are these men, tired, smelly, frustrated, washing out their nets and the preacher tells them they should have been fishing over there not where they had been fishing.

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So can you guess what the real miracle was in this story? Oh we answer most of the time that they listened to Jesus and caught a whole lot of fish. We are impressed with numbers, bigness, and success. But that is not the miracle that I see and I suspect it is not the miracle that Luke is hinting at. The real miracle is that these fishermen did not throw the preacher into the lake but actually listened to what he was saying. That is the real miracle that day!

I grew up near the Pacific Ocean. Our family would rent a cabin from time to time on the Oregon coast. I have a lot of nice memories of the ocean. One time after I had left home for graduate school I returned for a visit and our family took the short trip to the coast. We went to Depot Bay, Oregon. My sister and I checked into one of the charter companies that gave boat rides on the ocean. We were told that since it was off-season the charter boats would only go out if there were 12 people or more interested. My sister and I did not qualify.

About that time we could see the fishing boats returning from a day on the ocean. These were commercial boats and commercial fishermen. I suggested that maybe one of them would take my sister and me out if we asked.

The first couple of fishermen I approached did not use poetic language but I sensed they were thinking it. They were tired and dirty and just wanted to get things stored away so they could go home. They did not appreciate a couple of landlubbers bothering them.

Not giving up I approached another fisherman. He was just finishing washing down his boat and securing his nets. At first he said politely, "No, I am really tired." Then he thought for a moment and said, "Why not!" He called his son over and the four of us went out to sea for a couple of hours of some of the most fun I have had. He told stories of the whiskey runners and pirates and showed us some of the places where tourists would never be taken.

The miracle is that some of these fishermen listened to Jesus and went back out fishing.

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We may have more in common with the fishermen who DID NOT go back out fishing that day. Luke tells us about Simon and his brothers but makes no mention of the other fishermen who ignored the carpenter turned preacher. Sometimes we may have more in common with the ones who stayed on the shore than we realize.

What does Jesus really know about living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What does Jesus know about running a church; raising a family; defending a nation from terrorists; or operating a business? If our actions say anything---not our words but our actions----we don't think Jesus knows much about living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A rich man came to Jesus and asked Jesus what he must do to inherit the Kingdom of God. "Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor." Even then the man, we are told, thought Jesus was speaking through his hat----Jesus did not have a clue about what it takes to be successful---so he walked away.

You might think that is a nice Sunday school tale that has nothing to do with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After listening to some in Congress and listening to some of the pundits who are suggesting that our entire economy will grind to a halt if the minimum wage---which has not been adjusted for 10 years---is raised a couple of dollars you might agree that Jesus does not understand global politics. What do you think Jesus would say if the question of raising the minimum wage were posed to him? Jesus just does not know what he is talking about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our Jesus says God runs a heavenly lottery where the right prayer gives the prayee instant wealth. The Jesus we have molded even though he was innocent when executed favors capital punishment. The Jesus we have created loves to fight wars, loves to see lands devastated, and hates all sorts of people especially the people we designate as "enemies".

No the real Jesus sounds as strange to us as a preacher telling a mechanic how to fix the car or as strange as a carpenter turned Holy person telling tired fishermen where they could catch more fish.

A preacher was walking down a country road and saw a young farmer struggling to reload a cart that had lost its load of hay.

“You look hot, my son,” said the preacher. “Why don’t you rest a moment and then I’ll give you a hand?”

“No thanks, said the young farmer. “My father would not like it.”

“Don’t be silly;” said the minister, “everyone is entitled to a break. Come, have a drink of water. Rest in the shade.”

Again the young man protested, “Oh no, sir. My father would be really mad.”

Losing his patience the clergyperson said, “Your father must be a real slave driver. Tell me where I can find him and I’ll give him a piece of my mind!”

The young farmer replied, “He’s right there under that pile of hay!”

The miracle is that we listen to Jesus at all. The miracle is that we seek Jesus’ council and hearing it follow it even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and even when what Jesus says sounds counterproductive.

Several years ago there was a television commentary about a woman whose daughter had been brutally murdered. They finally caught the man and he was sentenced to death. The mother intervened on his behalf and because of her intervention his sentence was changed to life in prison. Over the years the mother began to contact the one who had murdered her daughter and at one point he asked for and received her forgiveness. The man became a Christian and to the woman became like a son.

What I remember about the show was what she shared next. She said that many of her friends became angry at her and abandoned her. Members of her family accused her of not loving her daughter. And what astounded her even

more was that hundreds of people---who had no connection---felt so moved as to write her and tell her what a bad mother she was because she forgave the man who murdered her daughter.

The woman went on to confess that it had not been easy. It took a lot of hard work to work through her anger and desire for vengeance. She prayed and prayed and then one day realized that her anger would change nothing---except it was changing her. So she did what Jesus said to do—she forgave even her enemy. She took seriously what she had heard from pulpits and read in scripture and heard from Sunday school lessons. She forgave and learned to love the man who had murdered her daughter. What she could not understand was how so many others who heard the same words from their churches could not forgive her for forgiving him.

I cannot tell you what to do. All I can say is Jesus stands before us suggesting that we should love the enemy, suggesting that we should share our material blessings, suggesting that we should treat all people with respect, suggesting that mercy, generosity, justice, and love are definitive behaviors, and suggesting that when we do these things we will discover so many fish in our spiritual nets that we will have a hard time hauling them to the shore.

And we can stand and talk about how much we love Jesus but then go on to say that Jesus just does not understand the world after 9/11, or what it means to live under the threat of terrorism. Jesus does not understand the pressures to be successful, or to make a lot of money, or to worry about health insurance and pension funds. We can stand and say what does a carpenter and a preacher

from almost 2,000 years ago even have the nerve to give us advice on how to live in our global, stressful world of today? We can do that and many do.

But some---perhaps many----will look at their sore hands and tired as we are, filled with doubt as we are, we will push our boats back into the lake after a hard night of catching nothing. Some of us will pull ourselves up, climb into the boat, row out into the sea and see if this Jesus does know what he is talking about. And that, when it happens, will still be as miraculous today as it was then. Amen.