

From the Shoreline to the Sea – Luke 5:1-11

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On the surface, it appears that this story from Luke 5 is a fishing story. There are fishermen, fishing boats, and, at the end, lots of fish.

Speaking of fishing, what do you call a girl hanging off the side of a fishing boat? Annette!

You've heard the wise old adage: "Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for the whole day. Teach a man to fish, and you'll get rid of him for the whole weekend!"

These fishermen in the story today were like that: they fished a lot! But it wasn't because they were recreational fisherman and treated it as a hobby; it's because it was their profession. Their livelihood depended upon their success in hauling in fish to support their families.

On this day, they had really struggled to find success. Along the shoreline following a rather fruitless night at sea, Simon Peter, responding to Jesus' request to put their boats out a little further into the deeper water and let their nets down again, responded, "We've worked hard all night and caught nothing."

They had retreated to the shoreline. They were tired and feeling defeated.

We can relate. We reach those moments when we've worked so hard and given it our best but come up short. Or we feel defeated when the world around us doesn't step up to the plate to make a difference in the lives of the people or causes we embrace.

We're tired, anxious, and frustrated, and we feel like there's no hope.

In Peter's case, he was at his lowest: "We've worked hard all night and caught nothing." But...Peter is evidently, amid his discouragement, not without hope. Because he continues in his response to Jesus with this: "But, because you say to drop our nets in into the deeper water, I'll drop them."

Somehow, amid his darkest moment, Peter was able to push past his prior failures for another chance at success. And of course, this time, when he does drop the nets into the deeper waters of the sea, they catch so many fish that their nets start to break.

There is this sense of amazement at what has happened. Not only does Peter refuse to have his past failures dictate his future success; when he finds success, he is amazed by it.

How many of us have been truly amazed by something we didn't think was possible? Now, I don't mean something like driving into a packed parking lot and seeing a parking space suddenly come open. That's not amazing; that's just good luck.

But something that truly doesn't have an explanation. It just happens: a miraculous healing, the right person at the right time entering your life who brings you joy, being spared something horrible that should've happened to you because of your choices or simply being in the wrong place.

These things are just amazing.

Peter's good fortune, authored by Jesus, was one of those things. It set him on a different path. It convinced him of what was possible when he trusted in the one who was teaching the crowds by the shoreline that day. Maybe others in the crowd, too, had suffered disappointment after disappointment, sidelined by their failures and yearning for a good word.

They learned that their failure didn't have to be the final word. And maybe Jesus' request of Peter, and Peter's trust in what Jesus would have him do, provided the inspiration for all the others witnessing this event to continue pressing on amid a series of disappointments.

Past failures would not prohibit their future success.

The next part of this story involves Peter's reaction to this great haul of fish. He's amazed, yes. And as part of his amazement, he falls at Jesus' knee and confesses, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinner!"

As we would find out, this is more a story about Jesus choosing those who would follow him than the miracle of the large catch of fish. And when Peter bows and acknowledges his sinfulness, we see who it is that Jesus calls to follow him.

Jesus was not looking for perfect people—just committed ones. And whatever would become of Peter's future, he first had to begin with the self-recognition that he was a sinner.

And that's true for all of us. We're not perfect, and we're always in need of forgiveness. In our Presbyterian way of worship, that's why corporate confession comes early in the service. We acknowledge our imperfections, trusting God will forgive us and use us still. And God's pardoning of our sins allows us then to hear God's word and respond to it in gratitude.

In our everyday challenges, we shouldn't be stymied by our flaws. They are part of our humanity. And God doesn't disqualify us for God's love or the opportunity to do good things by the mistakes we make.

In fact, God sends us out—as we are—to make a difference in the world.

The reality is that sometimes we get stuck on the shoreline and are reluctant to go out into the deep water because we feel we're not good enough, that our mistakes and failures disqualify us from the ability to achieve future success.

At the end of this story, Jesus shifts the focus to the future by using a formula that offers assurance to those who have just witnessed something amazing. Beyond saying, "Fear not," Jesus says, "From now on you will be catching people" (5:10), which gives his would-be followers a glimpse of their future despite their fears.

And in this declaration, there's a quiet reassurance that as we move into deeper waters, Jesus will be with us.

Yesterday, February 8, marked the 115th anniversary of the founding of the Boy Scouts of America. And today is Scout Sunday here, where we recognize the impact and legacy of Cub Scout Pack 444 and Boy Scout Troup 444 over many decades.

Hey, I found this list this week, titled, "You Might Be A Boy Scout If..." And it included these identifying marks:

- you carry your own toilet paper wherever you go.
- you continue to wear clothes until they stand on their own.
- you tie up your little brother ... and he can't get loose.
- you have something on your shoe, and you're sure it's "only mud."
- everything in your cupboard says "instant — just add water."
- your favorite cologne is Deep Woods Off!

One of the great appeals of Scouting is that it challenges kids to explore a wide range of outdoor activities and educational programs, and to make surprising discoveries about themselves and the world around them. They find that the comfort of staying

home is really no match for the amazing things that happen when they venture out.

It's like the shoreline versus the sea. Due to our humanity, we often find ourselves stuck on the shoreline—imperfect and discouraged by the failures we've suffered. But when we venture out, when we accept the invitation from somebody who loves us and encourages us to go out into the deep water of the sea, there's a chance that we will discover something enriching and satisfying and amazing.

Scouting, which is really a form of discipleship, can help us beat back our discouragement, our disappointment, and our misguided identities as failures or outcasts.

Jesus says there's always a new day, always a new opportunity for something different, meaningful, and profitable.

More amazing than that catch of fish that Peter and his partners hauled in was what they did after that. They left everything and followed Jesus. They weren't failures. They had what it took to do something meaningful and faithful.

And that's true for all of us.