

Sermon: Rockin The Boat

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Lev. 19:34; Luke 5:1-10

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Ever had a guest you didn't expect? I can see most of us have had this experience. Picture that person's face because unexpected people who erupt into our lives are hard to forget. Okay now allow me to ask, when is the worst time to have someone show up unexpected and then sound like a know it all? For me, the worst time for anyone or anything unexpected is when I am exhausted and frustrated and this is where we find Jesus and some fishermen.

Luke's account is distinctive because he does not treat this historic event as a typical "call" story. The Gospel does not begin with the disciples being called by Jesus. The narrative begins with Jesus teaching in a synagogue in Nazareth. Then Jesus heals a man oppressed by an unclean spirit and wouldn't you know it Simon's mother –in-law needs healing right before Jesus is supposed to go on his preaching tour throughout the synagogues of Judea. The crowds became so big and intense that they pressed Jesus out of the buildings and into spaces of open air. Jesus is exhausted and frustrated. The crowds are getting bigger but they just don't seem to understand the reason Jesus is with them. He keeps preaching about the Kingdom of God. What the heck is that? Something about Jesus

feels a bit fishy but no one can put their finger on what that is. Jesus begins to back himself out and away from the crowd pressing in on him and finds himself by two empty boats on the north end of the Sea of Galilee. The boats are empty because the fishermen have been out all night and have come up empty. They are exhausted and frustrated. All they want to do is clean their nets, go home, grab a bite to eat and go to bed. The last thing any of them want is an unexpected guest telling them what to do. Especially Peter. Peter was in no mood to dilly dally with anyone, especially a know-it-all that does not fish for a living.

I believe we have a miracle about to happen. Imagine with me: Jesus steps into Simon's (Peter's) boat and yells to the men cleaning their nets, "Hey guys, get back into your boats and go out and cast your nets on the other side."

Imagine Simon Peter looking at the old boy's network and rolling his eyes like Gene Wilder and then turning around and saying to Jesus, "You talkin' to me?" like a wise guy. Well, if you can imagine this then imagine just the opposite happening. In fact, a miracle happens. Luke decides to go the opposite direction from Mark's rendition in his Gospel that painted Peter as a bully. Luke remembers all that Peter did for the sake of his call, for Christ and for the first church, so he paints a more open and compelling narrative.

Peter realizes his boat has become a pulpit for a prophet and he responds, “Master-*epistata: the one who has authority* - you can clearly see that we have been fishing all night and we are exhausted, but I will trust you and do what you ask because I need something more in my life than this fruitless and stinky way of living.”

Now Peter had common sense. Their nets were clean, they were depleted of a single catch and asking the boys to get back into their boats and cast out their clean nets was going to require an act of faith that Peter had heard about but never tried. And Peter was the Boss of the fishing arena so telling Jesus, “Well, you are the one in charge so if you say so, I will cast out the way you envision” must have shocked his buddies. Peter listening to a non-fisherman is the first miracle. Then casting his nets and telling the others to get into the second boat and cast their nets on the other side was miracle number 2.

Folks, following God’s vision when we are exhausted and frustrated, surrendering to the leadership of the Spirit, is what opens the door to new life, new ways of living and being with one another. Following God’s instruction is the door to miracles. As followers of the ways of God revealed through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we do not need to wait until we understand and agree in order to follow the vision of God

among us. What we need is to surrender to the question and dare to cast our nets in a new way, a way that may not make sense to us at the time. Respecting who God is and surrendering to all God is, this is the door to the way of being a new community that we do not even have in us to imagine being. However, this I know for sure, without following the Spirit, we will have no energy or power to harness and empower us to become new people serving in a new way together.

So what transpires?

The CAST Happens.

Then Disaster almost occurs when the CATCH happens.

Their nets became so full that they began to break and their boats were swamped. They weren't prepared for the CATCH.

I have listened to many ministers and congregants say, "Well, we can't be radically hospitable with our time, talents and treasures because the sign on the wall says we can only fit so many people in here at a time and our insurance may go up or people may come in with their own ideas and the walls and floors would be hard to keep in pristine shape and the fact remains that we are exhausted, frustrated and disappointed about how things have turned out so far." If any community of faith waits to be radically hospitable, if any of us decide to stay

in our exhaustion, frustration and petty, “This is what I wanted to happen and I am upset” pity parties, we will be choosing to close the door for miracles. God has promised abundant BEING for those who dare to cast on the other side at all times.

The great catch was almost too much. Imagine the CELEBRATION and fearful voices as they kept casting and pulling in their nets. But wait! Look! They were not overwhelmed. They were astonished and they were humbled and they were convicted around their doubt and selfish ideas of how they wanted to cast and catch their way of life.

Can't you hear Simon's boisterous laugh and sailor expressions wafting through the dawn as he said, “Well hells bells boys look at this! Well I'll be damned! I've never experienced anything like this before!” Then he spins around and sees Jesus looking straight into his heart and he falls to his knees and says, “You...you are more than I can handle. Your ways are so far beyond what I know and if you really knew me you would choose another boat. I mean I am a sailor and I talk like a sailor because that's how I think, it's what I know. Please leave me alone. Your heart is too much for me to receive.”

Then the boys began dancing around Peter, screaming joyful things in unsanitary ways to one another in celebration.

They Cast. They Caught. They Celebrated. Then what happened?

Jesus can see and feel the fear in Peter's heart...the fear of being seen for who he was and the fear that the boys might understand that he wasn't the best boss or fisherman to emulate. Jesus picks up Peter's face and says, "There is nothing to fear so don't be afraid." Then he smiles and says, "From now on, you will be casting your nets for men and women and you will catch them, celebrate with them and then release them to do what you do."

Then what happened?

Simon Peter turned to the boys who were watching this scene with their mouths wide open and he says, "I'm quitting. I am leaving all this behind. I am leaving my ways of believing, perceiving, thinking, feeling...heck...I am leaving my ways of living behind and I am going to follow this man who knows what he is talking about. I'm going to go fish for something new. Something that lasts. Something that is bigger than me, something that will outlive me."

And then he RELEASED his nets. He left them behind. He left the biggest catch of his fish fishing days behind. And his good ol' boys did the same because they trusted Peter and whoever Peter trusted and left everything for must be bigger and better than they could envision on their own.

CAST. CATCH. CELEBRATE. RELEASE.

But here is the clincher for us today. In order to cast, catch, celebrate and release, we must dare to be hospitable to the unexpected stranger. We must let them get comfortable in our boats and we must be willing to listen to their ideas, especially when we are exhausted, frustrated and disappointed. Why? Because they just may have the healing words and new ways we need to be fulfilling God's purposes for us and not our own. Our own ways are fruitless and stinky.

Last Monday, my daughter Sarah called me and said, "Well, it's official. I am a failure as a Mom. Last week Luke's school presented an opportunity for us to select and pay for six warm lunches to be delivered to him at school. I accidentally checked cheese pizza instead of pepperoni and Luke will only eat pepperoni and they didn't have any extra and no one shared with him. I just cried imagining his hurt."

Trying to encourage her I replied, "But you always pack snacks for him so he was okay."

Sarah sniffled, "That's what Luke said. He said he was ok and that it was just a bummer. I told him if any of his friends do not have a lunch I want him to share with them. Then our alarm didn't go off this morning but I was able to get Luke to his bus. His hair looked like he had been electrocuted. When I got back home I saw a note on the fridge reminding us that today was

picture day. FAILURE. So now I am on my way to Luke's school to fix his hair. “

I invited Sarah over for tea. We played with Jeremy in the Park. We talked and laughed. Later that evening she called me and shared that she had taken Luke and Jeremy to Castle Park just a few blocks from my house. When they were there she noticed a little boy, around 8 or 9 years old, watching her play with Jeremy and he also was watching Luke play. The boy walked up to her and pointed to Jeremy and asked her,

“Is that your little boy?”

Sarah said, “Yes”.

The boy asked, “Do you have an older son?”

Sarah said, “Yes, he's over there.”

Sarah walked the boy over to Luke and the four of them played together for thirty minutes. When it was time for Sarah to leave she told the boy, “It's time for us to go now,”

“Why do you have to leave?”

“Because we need to go to the grocery store and I promised my boys I would take them to get a slurpee.”

“Oh. Ok”, he said sadly. Then he looked up at Sarah and said, “If you were my mom I would have the best mom in the world.”

This little soul was longing to be seen, to belong, to be invited to play. He broke Sarah's heart wide open.

She said, "Oh thank you. You have made my day very special."

Of course I was crying as Sarah was sharing her story. I told her how proud I was of her and how her response made the little boy feel like he was special.

Sarah affirmed this little boy. She gave meaning to his presence but don't miss the other miracle. Sarah began her day feeling like a failure and when she was hospitable to a stranger, a little boy, heaven gave her what she needed. The little boy affirmed her and yes he broke her heart...he broke her heart wide open.

I want us to watch a video about a boy named Jack.

VIDEO CLIP

<https://www.facebook.com/cbcdocs/videos/10154554290861950/>

We all have a bag of rocks to deal with, to carry, to learn how to empty and how to live into for reasons we may never understand and for reasons that become doors to miracles.

How hospitable do you think you are? How hospitable do you think we are as a community of faith? What happens when God steps into our boat uninvited?

I know that God is present among us, being pressed upon to be and do something that we want, that fits neatly and

comfortably into our ideas and visions for our personal and communal lives. I believe the Spirit is speaking to us in our exhaustion, frustration and disappointment. I believe God wants us to QUIT some of the ways we have been perceiving and doing things and catch Heaven's vision for us. I believe we need to CAST our nets on the other side so we can CATCH the vision, the ways God has for us to move forward. I believe God loves us and desires to CELEBRATE our journey with us. And I believe God wants us to RELEASE ourselves into exploring how to be fishers of men and women, but first we need to be radically hospitable in our welcoming, in our inviting others to coffee or to our homes. I believe God wants us to catch Her vision so we can be enthusiastic as we listen to new stories and fresh ideas. We need to be radically hospitable in all of our social media endeavors, in talking to our friends, in talking to our family and our neighbour in line beside us at the grocery store and with those waiting to play with us at the park. Are you and I ready to welcome Jack and his parents and our friends into our midst? Are we ready to listen to what they need so we are prepared to catch, celebrate and release them into a joyful journey with us?

Who are we as a community of faith? Why would anyone want to play with us? Are we fishing to feel good about ourselves? Are we fishing for knowledge so we can be RIGHT or better than them, whoever they are? Are we fishing to have our own

needs met or are we fishing to meet the needs of the stranger, the wounded, the millennials, the elderly in transition, the autistic, gay, straight or in-between? Are we fishing at all? And if our answer is yes, are we fishing with our own nets in our own ways? I really want us to think about these questions this week. I invite you to share your journey through these questions with me. Call me, Email me, Text me. Invite me over for coffee or tea. Let's talk. You and any friend you invite are welcome to come to my home tomorrow evening for Whine It Down. This opportunity to connect has been in our announcements and on our social media for a few weeks. It's BYOB (wine or pop). I will have tea, coffee, water, cheese crackers and fruit to accompany anything you come to whine about with the hope that we will see our commonality and offer encouragement and solutions without judgement. My door opens at 7. You may get my address from Mary in the office. I have cast my net. Will you dare to cast yours? Let's learn how we need to Cast, Catch, Celebrate and Release. And then let's rock this boat because I promise God is already in our boat and rockin the status quo. May we live and love with radical hospitality. Amen.