

What a straightforward text! Fishing boats unsuccessful and a night was wasted. Jesus said try again and miraculous catch followed. And then, rather than keep at it when so successful Jesus said, time to try something new.

"Follow me and leave your nets behind." Why read again a story we know so well? Isn't the meaning obvious? Jesus was recruiting disciples, right? But as a wise man once said, "Never be afraid to state the obvious--it is what most people have forgotten."

So, let's consider the key elements: The disciples were tired yet allowed Jesus' use of boats to preach. He said the boats only had a use when you were in them ... you, now will be somewhere else. Consider what that meant for them! They had worked all night, cleaned everything up, and then he told them "Throw out nets" (*Why did they do it? Would any of us have done it, and if so, what would we have been muttering under our breath?*)

What followed was an unbelievable catch – maybe their biggest ever. Because they didn't argue with Jesus, their life was filled with an incredible surprise. (As seems to happen so often when people hang around Jesus!) In fact, there were so many fish their boat began to sink!

And then in the moment of their greatest success as fishermen they left everything behind; the fish, the income from those fished, their boats, nets, families and walked away from what they knew. They left EVERYTHING and followed Jesus! These fishermen were out of their minds -- right? They took the equivalent of a winning lottery ticket and left it on the lakeshore for any passerby to find. This was their most successful moment ever and they walked away.

Luke included this in his Gospel to let the world know that in our new life with Christ, priorities might change, leaving nets, boats and fish behind! How often does Christ call each of us to abandon familiar ways of living, comfortable places, and changes our lives with his call to follow him instead of the world.

Has something like this ever happened to you? By you? Despite you? Such an approach is counter intuitive; why would someone leave what they know best? When they were at pinnacle of success? Or is this about taking what you have learned and been given and find real purpose and value in using it in new way?

Jesus doesn't call everyone to be a missionary in a far-off land, or leave a family and friends, or change vocations. This was a specific time when Jesus had some people in mind for a specific task – to be his closest disciples. However, it does have some lessons that apply to all!

How challenging might it be for us to make similar leaps of faith? What must be left behind as Jesus calls me? How can my response mirror that of those disciples (asked to leave greatest success EVER) or is Jesus calling me to something a little more normal and appropriate in my life?

In hearing this text again, I wonder if sometimes my busy-ness in cleaning, mending, and casting “nets” prevents me hearing God’s call to calling me to a new task or a change in priorities. Could it be God is calling me to throw nets on the other side of the boat (or maybe leave boat and nets behind) and embrace new approaches and meet new people?

Might a congregation be so busy maintaining its fleet and resources that it can likewise miss similar challenges and opportunities to follow and serve Jesus in ways that had never been considered before? Are any of you so busy, some comfortable, so conditioned at work or home that you might be missing Jesus’ invitation to change your lifestyle or priorities? Might he have something different in mind for you?

The disciples began by doing something they knew well, and Jesus challenged them by saying maybe there is another way to do it even better! What a surprising miracle followed. Once Jesus had their attention, he said NOW you are REALLY ready to follow me!

What if through prayer and reflection you or I discovered God is only asking us to be more open to opportunities and needs for us to share gifts that he has given? Such as maybe finding new ways to use old gifts, like mentoring, teaching Sunday School, or tutoring children who can’t read. Maybe spending time with our spouse or children in more meaningful ways? Or being aware of the stranger in our midst who can mend nets better than me or knows already how to throw them out in a new way?

What if a congregation with unused property donated it for someone to build a hospice facility or retirement home on that same property? It is like teaching an old dog new tricks, except it involves finding ways to embrace gifts, abilities, interests and talents in a new way. Maybe it will never happen for you or me, but the point is, “what would we do if Jesus asked?” (And what if he already has?)

Do we do what we do every day because it has been comfortable, or it is what we feel we do best? Might there, in fact, be times when God places opportunities or people in front of us that all of our “net minding” gets in the way of us seeing? It well might be that we are doing exactly what God is calling us to do, but how will we know if we don’t spend time in prayer, spiritual growth, and conversation with others that God has gathered around us?

It is so easy to keep doing what we have always been doing, just like those fishermen were used to! How will we make certain that we keep hearing Jesus' call and not be so busy cleaning fish that we forget why we are doing what we do? Hesitations often are couched in practical terms, just as it probably was for Peter's buddies in the boat. "What does Jesus expect of me? Why can't someone else do it? What if it interferes with my job?"

Our sin-filled reaction is to wait and see, run away, or drown oneself in work or play. Our text restates the obvious; faith empowers even the weakest to succeed. We know that at least Peter, Andrew, James, and John answered the call ... the key point in Gospel now comes to life! The miraculous catch was NOT to prove that Jesus is God, but to PROMISE that with God even those who feel they can't –"CAN!")

What we are competent at, God is miraculously better! We can't be all things to all people, and we must remember that the body of Christ is bigger than Zion, but how do we know what God is calling us to be and do if we aren't willing to listen and then willing to either keep fishing or walk away from boats and do ministry in a completely different way. Like a magician who calls someone out of the audience to help perform "magic," Jesus calls normal people to leave safety of being a bystander and become a disciple. In doing so He empowers us to be his vehicle for daily miracles!

To answer that call is dangerous, for it leads us to a lifetime of servant love; and when one lives to serve, one can be taken advantage of or ignored. To move forward we must consciously give up control and live by faith. That might mean leaving "old nets" behind, or even a miraculous catch of fish ... but to follow Christ means to live in a new community, with new perspective and a new love. Jesus challenges comfortable living in understandable language.

For a fisherman he might talk about a miraculous catch. For a musician, he might talk about using music to draw people to Christ. To a hungry person, food is how servant love takes shape. For a child, a mentor or teacher is vehicle through which the love of Christ might take shape. And for a stranger it might simply be a smile or a welcome!

Sometimes the net has to be thrown in a new way and sometimes it has to be left behind and another method of servant love utilized. In any event, when Jesus calls and says, "follow ME!" What that really means is "leave the nets (or what is most familiar and easy) behind." Think about it. Pray about it. Is Jesus asking you to throw nets out on the other side, or leave the nets behind? Good question, isn't it?

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