

Peter Wiley  
 Luke 5:1-11  
 Hudson  
 2-4-07

SCRIPTURE: *Once while Jesus was standing by 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 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.*

SERMON: Superbowl Sunday. My one Bears fan friend here in the church (there aren't many of us), shared this with me. It's about being a true Bears fan. A man had 50 yard line tickets for the Bear's game. As he sits down, a man comes down and asks if anyone is sitting in the seat next to him. *No*, he says, *the seat is empty*. "This is incredible," says the man. "Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for a Bears games, the biggest sporting event in the world, and not use it?" He says, *Well, actually, the seat belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she passed away. This is the first Bears game we haven't been to together since we got married in 1967.* "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. That's terrible. But couldn't you find someone else? A friend or a relative, or even a neighbor to take the seat?" The man shakes his head. *No, they're all at the funeral.*

That's being more than a fan . . . that's been a true and loyal follower – and more than a little obscene. It sounds a little like the time when later in the gospel, Jesus told a man to follow him . . . but the man said he had to bury his father first . . . but Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead" . . . or, in other words, "be about my work first." (9:57-62)

Our passage this morning is so rich with meaning . . . but the part that really grabs me – even haunts me – are those few words where Jesus told Simon Peter and the others, *From now on* . . . Do you think they caught the meaning of what he was saying to them? This wasn't a quick easy task, a detour, a one night event. This was, *from now on*. This wasn't a part time job, a hobby or something they could turn on and off. This was, *from now on*. It wasn't even a new full time job . . . this was the new center of their being, of their lives. *From now on*,

means, let the dead bury the dead . . . their work was about the living. Nothing was to get in their way.

Simon, James and John had been out on the lake all night fishing. It's when the fishing was the best because the fish rose to the surface. Not that it mattered that night – they caught nothing. So this Jesus tells them to go back on the lake and cast their nets one more time. But it was too late to catch fish. The sun was up. The window had passed. But Simon, James and John were good fisherman . . . always willing to give it one more try. And Jesus proved to be a sonar fish-finder 2000 years before its time. One cast . . . and they had more fish than they'd ever seen before. Enough to sink, not one boat, but two! That's a whole lot of fish. And Simon knew it was trouble. You just don't catch fish like that. He knew it would change everything . . . and he wasn't so sure he wanted everything changed. So he told Jesus to get away from him. But Jesus told him it was too late. Everything *had* changed. *From now on*, had already come.

That's the way fishing is. It's not just an activity, it's a way of life. A few years back I spent a little time on a Great Lakes Commercial Fishing Boat – a Gill Net Boat. Gill Net boats are unusually funny looking things that look like a mistake from the past. But they're still the boat of choice for fishermen who make their living on the northern Great Lakes. They're wood and totally enclosed with cabins running the full length of the boat. Sliding doors in the front, back and on one side (for dropping nets, hauling them in, and one on the side to unload at the dock). They have no windows, except for a few little portholes in a tiny pilot house sticking out of the top. They can withstand almost any weather the Great Lakes can throw at them. And they fish year round, crashing through the ice. They're all about the business of fishing. Nothing else. No distractions.

I was on Jeff Weborg's boat. Just six months earlier in mid-December, his brother Leif's boat, the "Linda E," had disappeared as it was making its way to a fishery with a thousand pounds of chubs. His brother and nephew died when the boat went down after apparently being run over by an iron-ore barge. It happened, not out of recklessness . . . but because his brother had been so caught up in fishing that they left the pilot house unmanned – like they all do, because their purpose is fishing.

The loss of his brother and nephew didn't slow down Weborg . . . nor did it distract him from his work. Last summer he lost his arm when it got caught in the automatic roller hauling in the nets. I read an interview with Weborg about the accident. Nowhere in it did he talk about the pain of losing his arm. All he mourned was that he wouldn't be able to fish anymore. That's the way fishing is.

I wonder, do you think that's why Jesus used the image of fishing for what life in the faith would be like? He didn't say they should do a little fishing for people on the side. He said, *from now on* . . . From now on they would be fishers of people. That's what their lives would be centered on.

What does that kind of fishing look like? First: *From now on . . .* means it get's your full attention. It's not the sort of thing you do half-heartedly. Second: *From now on . . .* means, if you're going to go fishing, you don't offer them a little bit of bait . . . you offer the whole of who you are . . . for the long haul. Like a true football fan . . . you're not just there when the team is doing well . . . you stick with them when everything is falling apart. Third: *From now on . . .* means you offer something that's real. You don't offer some cheap bait . . . some fake lure claiming that if you "sign up with God," all your ills will be over. Like the TV preacher I saw last week who showed a young couple who decided they were going to give to that preacher's ministries . . . and low and behold, all their troubles were over. For every dollar they gave they got two more in return. They got a house and a car. That's false advertising.

No, faithful fishing is sharing the word of a God who doesn't solve all problems . . .  
 . . . but *is* fully present.

Not distracted by the chaos that whips through our lives . . . but is fully here – like a fisherman who doesn't bother with the pilothouse, because he's so focused on the moment at hand. To be fishers of people, if we take scripture seriously, means that we're in it with each other for the long haul. We don't try to win people over by some promise we can't live up to. No, we offer ourselves as the presence of Christ. We fish with our own lives. Living them as the embodiment of Christ.

*From now on . . .* doesn't mean that's all you do. But it does mean it is *always* a part of everything you do. It's who you are. *From now on* means you can't just live like you used to. It means you're somehow different . . . always . . .

What does this passage say to us today? *From now on . . .* It means it's about the whole of us.

- In the morning if we were feeling grumpy.
- At work if we feel frustrated.
- Standing in line when we're in a hurry.
- With friends and family who can be more than a little difficult.
- When a stranger rubs us the wrong way.

We're told it's about throwing ourselves all the way in. Not part-time . . . but always. What does this passage say to us today? If we take and eat the bread and drink from the cup and mean it, we will go out as a different people than when we entered. If we take seriously Jesus call to follow . . . well . . . from now on, we'll do just that.