

“Called to Your Future with Your Past as a Tool”

Romans 8:28 & Luke 5:1-11

Today, we are blessed to *recognize and celebrate* the graduation of four members of our Riverlawn family: High school graduates: *Ansley Shamblin, Sarah Wandling, and Vicky Willson*; and College graduate: *Katie Beth Bowens*. We congratulate you for all that you’ve accomplished, we’re proud of you, and pray God’s blessings on you in your continued growth and endeavors. In an important way, this moment marks a new beginning in your lives, a transition point ... so, I wanted to draw on one of the greatest transition points in all the Bible – the calling of Peter to follow Jesus. In this story, we see someone make a big decision, a very important decision, that means change, as well as a degree of uncertainty about what was to come ... I believe such a story can be very relevant to each of you – and really, to the rest of us as well. As you face the future, I want to encourage you to hear the invitation of Jesus, his call on your life to continually and wholeheartedly follow him.

Another reason I like this story is that it shows how “down to earth” Jesus is. You are going “out into the world” as they say ... and out in the world was exactly where Jesus does his best stuff. This event with Peter doesn’t take place in a synagogue with a hushed crowd listening to an eloquent exposition of a favorite psalm. Instead, the crowd presses around Jesus on a smelly landing, with tired fisherman nearby cleaning their empty nets after a long, fruitless night. Jesus enters the world of people ... and as you move onto another place in your life, he wants to enter the world where you go.

At the start, Jesus doesn’t tell Peter how much he has to offer him ... nor does Jesus explain the unimagined ways in which Peter’s life will change for the better if he will pledge

loyalty to Jesus. Instead, he approaches Peter and basically says, “Peter, I want your help” ... “Will you help me?” And NOTICE, the request for assistance is from *within the everyday reality* of Peter’s work-a-day world – his boat, his rowing skills, his nets.

I believe Jesus does the same with *us* – that he wants to do the same with *you* – to use the things you’re good at ... your skills developed in *your* particular world – for the glory of God. I want you to notice: the help he requests is *authentic*, not fabricated. To do what he intends, he needs Peter’s boat and rowing skills. Do you see the beauty in this? ... Jesus’ ministry becomes a partnership with Peter. In one sense, as God, Jesus doesn’t need us. Since he can walk on water, he could have walked out there and preached on an H2O stage – of course, they’d probably be a bit distracted by that. But the point is, Jesus wants to include us ... and it’s not a patronizing or condescending thing. He honors us by inviting us to minister in his name.

Amidst his own professional world, Peter was able to listen to Jesus speak the Word of God to those assembled on the shore. In the process – don’t miss this – Jesus changed Peter’s familiar surroundings into a life-transforming meeting b/n them. When the teaching session concludes, the first-time reader of Luke’s Gospel would expect Jesus to thank Peter, ask to be taken back to shore, and proceed on his way. That’s NOT what happens. Jesus doesn’t want to be in your boat for just a *few* minutes. He doesn’t come into your world just for a quick and casual highlight. He’s got something bigger and better in store.

Amazingly, Jesus (the inland carpenter) gives orders to the professional fisherman on how and where to catch fish! This is an important detail because there will be times when what Jesus tells you to do seems unreasonable. Case in point – telling Peter to go out again

and drop his nets was a preposterous suggestion. Peter was exhausted. They had fished all night and caught nothing. *Ansley, Sarah, Katie Beth* – if you ever spend all night studying for a test, or work a long day on the job, and then right after you’re invited to perform an act of service or something else that glorifies Jesus, I want you to remember this, okay? (*smile*)

But anyway, the very idea that a *landlubber* from the highlands of Nazareth, who has probably never wet a line, should presume to tell a seasoned fisherman what to do ... is incredible. The fish can see and avoid the nets during the day, but they feed at night. Jesus’ instructions to Peter seem absurd ... But what happens?

The great catch of fish is the climax of the story. Even though Jesus wants to work alongside you, and let you do your thing, and do it well ... He’s the One in control. What shocks Peter most deeply perhaps is not the “miraculous catch” but the fact that he is suddenly faced with a real choice between the Master and what Jesus calls “mammon” – earth-bound interests. Think about it: every night, Peter and his team plied their trade in the hope of netting a great catch. Their sleep was punctuated with vivid dreams of that faint possibility. It’s akin to winning the lottery! And now, this *net-tearing, boat-swamping* catch can greatly enrich him and his team. *At last*, he’s hit the jackpot! ...

But wait ... if Jesus could do this ... make this kind of thing happen ... why was he still a *penniless rabbi*, wandering around teaching people for nothing? ... How could the kingdom of God possibly be more important than two boatloads of fresh fish ... how could the kingdom of God be more important than a prestigious degree ... that can lead to a lucrative career ... that can finally give us all the *things* we want? Evidently, Jesus cared more about ushering people into the kingdom than acquiring wealth ... and he still does.

Peter found himself face to face with a person who challenged his priorities on the deepest level. Peter sensed that he was in the presence of holiness. And he was afraid ... afraid of what would happen next. Did you notice how Peter changes how he talks to Jesus here. A few minutes ago, he called him “teacher” – and it might even have been a bit sarcastically. But here, he calls him “LORD.” And faced with authentic holiness, Peter senses that he is sinful, that what he has in himself is woefully inadequate. Peter tells Jesus, “Depart from me,” because he mistakenly thinks that the unclean will defile the clean, on contact. But Jesus knew better. For the clean in Jesus can purify the unclean. All that was needed was *contact*, and for that elevation of Jesus in our hearts from teacher to LORD.

I want to share one last point with you, and I want to encourage you (URGE you) to remember this ... Peter is granted continuity between his past and his future ... Jesus says, “Now you will be a fisher of people.” His acquired skills will be put to use to serve a greater purpose. By the way, the Greek word Jesus uses for catching here means “to catch *alive*.” So, catching and killing fish will be transformed into catching people and bringing them to new life. *Ansley, Sarah, Katie Beth* – remember this (and the rest of you as well): like Peter, Jesus calls you to your future, with your *past* as a tool! ... Everything that has gone into you up to this point – your experiences, your education, your relationships, your activities ... it can all be taken by God and used for good – for we know that God can work all things for good, for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

There will be things in your life that seem like “the big catch” – but remember, that boatload of fish wasn’t the big catch ... Peter was! As Jesus was talking about being a “fisher of people” – that was exactly what he was doing with Peter. And in the end, what

Peter did as a fisher of *people* made that “miraculous” catch look like a little baggie of minnows. Think of Pentecost, where after Peter preached, 3,000 people turned to Christ. Think of the people he healed, the churches he cared for as a shepherd, the generations of people transformed by his letters, now epistles in the New Testament. My point is: Just as Jesus landed Peter and used him for great things; He’s ready to catch *you*, so that you can *catch* others as well, using the very tools you’ve acquired. Like Peter, take your past and your skills with you, and move forward into a new venture of faith. Amen.