

Learning to Lead
Luke 5:1-11

Late one evening, a professor sat at his desk working on the next day's lectures. He shuffled through the papers and mail. He began to throw them in the wastebasket when one magazine – not even addressed to him but delivered to his office by mistake – caught his attention. It fell open to an article titled: "The Needs of the Congo Mission." The professor began reading it idly, but then he was consumed by these words: "The need is great here. We have no one to work the northern province of the Congo. And it is my prayer as I write these words that God will lay His hand on one – one on whom, already, the Master's eyes have been cast – that he or she shall be called to this place to help us."

The professor closed the magazine and wrote in his diary: "My search is over." He gave himself to go to the Congo. The professor's name was Albert Schweitzer. That little article, hidden in a periodical intended for someone else, was placed in his mailbox. Dr. Schweitzer became one of the great figures of the past century in a humanitarian work nearly unmatched in human history. Schweitzer heard the call, and responded. And because he responded, he learned how to lead.

Today we are talking about learning how to lead. God is calling us to mature in our faith. One mark of maturity is leadership. And some of the central leaders of the church are our elders and deacons: *"If anyone sets his heart on being an elder, he desires a noble task. Now the elder must be above reproach ... self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach ... not quarrelsome, not a lover of money ... Deacons, likewise, are to be worthy of respect, sincere ... not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience"* (1 Tim. 3:1-9).

Leadership in the church is a noble and challenging task, which takes a special kind of calling. We see such a call in our passage this morning. Jesus is giving a message, and the longer he talks, the larger the crowd becomes. He is addressing the people, but he is also doing something else: he's calling his disciples and building a leadership team. Jesus is still calling disciples and making leaders today. This passage talks about the kind of people Jesus calls to strengthen & grow his Church. *Servant-Leaders* are ...

1. People of Action – *not just wishers but doers* (vs. 1-3). Why did Jesus choose Peter's boat? Jesus could have rowed out by himself, but instead gives Peter a test. There was an opportunity to proclaim the kingdom of God, and Jesus wanted to invite Peter to be a part of it. And Peter responds – he offers his services – he offers himself.

When looking for people to lead, it's important to find people who are willing to help turn problems into solutions. Leaders are people who face difficulties head on instead of trying to dodge them. There will always be problems in every church, and there will always be those who are quick to point them out. But church leaders are those who not only point out issues but become part of the solution – people who say: "I see this as an opportunity and I am willing to help make it a reality" ...

2. People of Direction – *they follow the Lord's lead* (vs. 4-7). Jesus asks Peter to go farther out and let down the nets. Put yourself in Peter's shoes. He has been fishing all night. Some of you love to fish and the idea of fishing all night sounds wonderful – but in this case they had caught nothing! Also, Peter was cleaning the nets, which was a long process. To let the nets out again would mean they would have to be cleaned again! Jesus was not a fisherman, and Peter knew that the fish moved out into deep water during the day, and it would be next to impossible to catch any at that time.

Even though Peter knew better, and understood that it would make more work for him, he responds: “*Because you say so, I will ...*” (v. 5). If you want to underline a verse in the Bible, underline that one – because it should be the cry of every follower of Christ. No matter what we think or feel, ultimately whatever the Lord says is what we do. We must live our lives with this attitude: “Because you say so, I will.” Leaders in the church are action-oriented – but those actions are informed by the Word of God. And as they listen to the Word, as they learn from the Word, they can then follow the Lord’s lead ...

3. People of Humility – *they give God the credit* (vs. 8-9). Why did Jesus ask Peter to let down the nets and then give them the record catch? It was a test – a test I probably would have failed. I can just see myself saying, “Wow, look at all the fish *I* caught! Who would have thought that at this time of day *I* could have caught so many fish! *I* must be the greatest fisherman of all time.”

Peter did not respond that way. Instead, the miracle served as a reminder to him that Jesus was in control and *He* was the one who deserved credit. Instead of seeking to exalt himself as a success, the catch only drove Peter to his knees to recognize his own failures. [P] Success in any ministry is God’s and not our own. No matter how excellent the work or inspiring the worship, it is the Spirit of God who brings it about. Saying this does not mean that we should not strive for excellence. We should seek to do everything well. At the same time, we recognize that anything good that happens is from God ...

4. People of Vision – *they see the bigger picture* (v. 10). Imagine coming back with all those fish. Imagine the excitement when they got back to the shore. It’s like the salesman who has had the best sales year of his life or the athlete that is at the top of her game. But here, Jesus turns their focus from success in catching fish to catching people –

to instead be part of something that would change countless lives forever.

Tony Campolo once said, *“You have one life to live. Why not spend it on something that matters – that will make an eternal difference.”* It’s great to succeed. It’s even better to succeed at something that will last. If you really want to be successful, *don’t just work for dollars; work for destinies.* We need to live our lives with an eternal perspective. We need to ask, “What are we working for and will it last?” [P]

Steve Sogren pastored a church in Cincinnati. One Monday morning, he was feeling discouraged and said to his wife Janie, "I'm quitting the ministry!" Janie had heard this kind of talk before, so she suggested, "Why don't you go for a drive and think things through? That helps when you're stressed. And while you're out, could you be a sweetie and pick me up a burrito?"

Steve drove around for an hour, complaining to the Lord the whole time. Finally, he was at the drive-thru picking up Janie's burrito when he sensed the Lord speaking to him. He says it was not an audible voice – nothing came over the drive-thru speaker. In a subtle, quiet way, he sensed the Lord impressing this message on his heart, “If you open your door, I will give you a gift.” Even though he felt silly, Steve figured he had nothing to lose. He opened the door, looked down & saw embedded in the dirt a tarnished penny.

This is what he wrote about the experience: “I reached down to pry out the coin and held it in my hand, feeling less than thankful for this ‘gift.’ The Lord spoke to me again: ‘Many people in this city feel about as valuable as discarded pennies. I’ve given you the gift of gathering people who seem valueless. Though these are the people that the world casts off, they have great value to me. If you will open your heart, I will bring you more pennies than you know what to do with.’”

This reminds me of Paul's words to Timothy, *"I can endure all these things for the sake of those whom God is calling, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 2:10). That they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ ...

5. People of Sacrifice – *they are willing to leave it all behind* (vs. 11). Although they had just brought in the greatest catch they had ever had, they choose to leave it all behind. There is a cost to being a disciple of Jesus. There is a cost to being a leader in His Church. As those who follow after Jesus, our lives are to be marked by sacrifice.

The writer of Hebrews understood the difficulties involved in leadership. He gave these words to the church to encourage them to take care of their leaders: *"Your leaders keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden ..."* (Heb. 13:17). As his closing remarks continue, he asks the church to pray for all of them, so that they may live honorably in every way. [P]

That day, by the shore, Jesus called his first disciples and began the process of making them leaders. Jesus is still calling disciples. He is still calling people of action, direction, humility, vision, and sacrifice to lead His Church. Whether we have been called into leadership, or we have been given the important task of affirming and praying for our leaders, may the Lord grant us the strength, the wisdom, and the grace to live faithfully in His service and for His glory – today, and every day that follows. Amen.