

**A Sermon – by Alex Evans, Pastor**  
**Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Blacksburg, VA**  
**Sunday, June 8, 2008**

Texts: **Luke 5:1-11; II Timothy 1:1, 5-10**

**“Entrusted with Message and Mission”**

Last Friday evening, after a hearty supper, as the darkness of the evening was settling all around, 12 men from this church were sitting around a big campfire at the Men’s Retreat. And we were reading and reflecting on this very passage from Luke 5.

The passage reflects the busyness of the day for Jesus and others on the lakeshore. The crowds were big and pressing in to hear Jesus, to learn from him: it was so crowded that he sat in a boat to teach them. The fishermen had come back from fishing all night and had already cleaned their nets. They were tired but seemingly engaged in the moment.

Then Jesus turns to the fishermen, to Simon and the others, and instructs them to “put out into the deep waters and let down their nets.”

This was not a welcome idea: “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.” They challenge Jesus – what does he know about fishing. Fishing is their trade. Fishing is their life. They have fished all night. They have returned. They have cleaned the nets. Do they have to go out again just because Jesus says “put out into the deep and cast your nets?”

But they agree to do it. “Okay, if you say so, we will let down our nets.” But their response does not indicate too much confidence in what Jesus asks them to do.

So we were sitting around the big campfire talking about this – a bunch of men on a men’s retreat - talking about what this might mean for our lives. Maybe like the disciples we think we know what we are good at – and we doubt that Jesus really knows about OUR lives. So we listen to Jesus teach and encourage. That is fine. But when Jesus starts instructing us in our particular fields – like fishing for the fishermen – or when we feel like Jesus is beginning to tread on issues that we know lots about – our jobs, our careers, our families, our stuff – then it gets a little personal and we tend to get a little stiff, and it feels like Jesus is meddling.

So this is what we were talking about, confessing, struggling with around the campfire. Where are we dubious of Jesus entering our lives? Where are we resistant to hearing what Jesus might say to us, in our times and circumstances? Where are we reluctant to let Jesus speak, challenge us? Where do we echo the words of the fishermen – “we know about fishing; we have been fishing all night; don’t go meddling in that part of our lives, Jesus.”

Could Jesus really be calling us to new ways of thinking and doing things? Could Jesus really be getting into all aspects of our lives, especially those things that we think we know more about? This was our conversation around the campfire on last Friday night.

And then, ... THEN the conversation changed. Steve Drumheller and John Dillard were sitting on a log on one side and heard some noise behind them. They started

turning around, looking, and whispering to each other. The rest of us stopped talking. We all looked. It was a bear! It was really a bear, walking up within 25 feet of where we were sitting around the fire.

There was shock and fear – it WAS a bear, quite close! We all got quiet, in a frozen stare at the bear. There was excitement and adrenaline flowing. Then we each started stirring slightly – to protect ourselves if we needed to, to get a better look, to let it sink in – a bear had walked right up to where we were sitting and talking.

And then the bear's own inquiry and search shifted toward fear too. So the bear turned and moved quickly away. We tried to see where it was going, to get a better look at this animal, but it moved quickly out of sight into the dark woods again.

And as you could imagine, we quick talking about this passage about Jesus and the fishermen, and how it interacts with our lives, and we started talking about the bear. And throughout the weekend retreat, we maintained a healthy caution, and some hope, that the bear might make another appearance; but he/she did not.

I think what happened to us with the bear is not unlike what happened to the fishermen in the story at the lakeshore.

Whenever Jesus is around, there is always the great chance that the mundane will be flooded with the magnificent. Whenever Jesus is around, there is often the chance that what seems ordinary may become extraordinary. And the point of that magnificent, that extraordinary, whenever it appears, is to move us to new and deeper places of loving, and serving, of going and giving as disciples.

Catching fish is quite ordinary for fishermen. But putting out into the deep water again, especially after long hours of fishing, and then catching so many – so many that the nets were breaking – well, that just might get their attention and help the fishermen realize that Jesus is for real and perhaps Jesus may need to be taken more seriously in all aspects of life.

Sitting around talking about Jesus' call for our lives – yea, we know about that, and we want to be better followers of Jesus – but fear and excitement and awestruck – sort of like the fishermen in the boat – just might help us move further along in the journey of following Jesus with all parts of our lives. It just might help us think more seriously, devote more clearly, follow more intentionally Jesus' call.

Jesus' words and teachings are never intended just for a small corner of our lives that we can manage and keep off to the side. Jesus' words and teachings are intended to be a part of all of life.

Jesus' life and love is meant to be embodied in our lives and loves – all the time. So he keeps saying, come along with me – it's not only about fishing, it is about fishing for people. Come along with me. It is not only about Sunday worship and a little activity here and there which we call Christian. It is about living our daily lives, loving and giving, going and doing, with Jesus' teachings and ways front and center. Life with Jesus, which is what we are about, means our lives embody the ministry of Jesus. Jesus keeps trying to get our attention, to get us up and understanding that – and then we find our ways on the road to the Kingdom of God – to life and love, to peace and purpose, in this church and in all the world.

All through my years, one of the books that nourishes my spiritual life is a classic prayer book entitled A Diary of Private Prayer, by John Baillie. Dr. Baillie was a distinguished teacher, professor, and preacher from Scotland through the last century whose writings encourage real depth in faith and piety. The words, and the essence, of this particular prayer remains so powerful for me and my sense of call to ministry, to life with Jesus.

*God, ... Thou has been the refuge of good and wise (people) in every generation. When history began, Thou wast the first enlightener of (everyone's) minds, and Thine was the Spirit that led them. ...Through every age, Thou has been the Lord and giver, the source of all knowledge, the fountain of all goodness. The patriarchs trusted Thee...the prophets sought Thee. The psalmist rejoiced in Thee and Thou wert present in their songs. The apostles waited upon Thee ..The martyrs called upon Thee and Thou wert with them.*

It is a prayer that affirms the God who was and is, and is to come. Baillie continues, and this is where it connects to our lives:

*I thank thee God that this Christian way whereon I walk is no untried or uncharted road, but a road beaten hard by the footsteps of saints, apostles, prophets and martyrs. I thank thee for the fingerposts and danger-signals, which are known to us through study of the Bible, and all of history, and the great literature of the world.*

And Baillie concludes the prayer with grateful words which affirm our call to follow, along the same paths, living the faith entrusted to us, embodying the hope and commitments we see in Jesus Christ. (Baillie, Diary..., p. 25)

All of us are humbled and grateful that we are part of this heritage. The path that we are called to follow is well worn by so many who have gone before us – parents and grandparents, people in the faith who have touched and inspired our lives both those living and those living with God. We are also part of a great heritage in this church – following along a path that is well worn in loving service in this university community and to the ends of the earth. And we hear Jesus continuing to call us – to engage in life and ministry, to sacrifice and serve, to carry heavy burdens as God's people, to work for hope and light in our world, to strive for God's kingdom of justice and joy for all.

We have a new class of Elders in our church stepping up today to lead us too. This is a terrific group of faithful people – some who have been around for many years showing us their gifts and devotion. Others are newer members, even younger members who are learning as they go. This reflects our church's openness to leadership from all the congregation. And this group gets on that well worn path, striving to guide this church to new places of faithfulness, to build up this church for God's work in the world. It is a great season of life at BPC – yet we keep looking forward in faithful commitment and following. And all of this affirms that our ministry, our commitments, intend to be central in our life. Our following as disciples cannot be a peripheral thing. Our life and work in this church is very important – for each other, for God, for the world. Jesus wants our attention, our best energy, our deepest commitments, our on-going devotion, our lives. He is saying to us, come along, inviting us to follow with our full selves and all we have to offer. Jesus is inviting us to live our lives with Christ at the center, to keep learning, to keep connecting to one another to encourage each other, to keep going and

giving and doing in God's way. We have Bible School, we have mission ventures, we have music and worship. Even as seasons change, and there is an ebb and flow to life here, Jesus' call continues: we are to serve, to build up, to help the hurting, to pray, to heal, to love, to do. We have been entrusted with a message and mission that grounds our lives and shapes our existence on that "well-worn path."

I really like the words that the apostle Paul speaks to Timothy in the letter we have today. Timothy's faith has been handed down from his grandmother, Lois, through his mother Eunice, and that faith is now entrusted to Timothy. He has been given gifts in ministry. And the laying on of hands – which we will do momentarily – conveys the power and promise of all that has been passed along. It affirms that we are part of a great tradition. God wants to get our attention and God entrusts us with a message and mission following Jesus. We follow in the footsteps of saints and prophets. We carry on with the fishermen who dropped their nets and went with Jesus. We are seeking to give strength to those around us, and point the way to God's kingdom on earth. We are striving to nurture faith, create sincere community, grow in devotion, and go in loving service as far as we can go. We are striving to bear God's light and embody Christ's hope. We are seeking to live into God's new creation – in the way we treat one another, care for the lonely and hurting, work for justice, promote peace in the hurting world. We are seeking to move this world – with all its aches and ailments, groaning and longing - toward God's world. This is where Jesus keeps calling us to go – as new leaders on the Session, and individuals striving to follow Jesus, and as a community of caring and committed Christians around the globe.

We are entrusted with a message and a mission and it looks and sounds like this:

God is good and gracious, and greed is not appropriate in God's gracious world; self-centeredness is not appropriate, self-righteousness is not appropriate, nor arrogance. We are to live as disciples following Jesus.

God is love, and perfect love casts out fear. We are to trust God and keep going. We are not free for vengeance; we leave that to God. We are to live as disciples.

God says, "Do not fear, I am with you," and the world is held together by God. We can walk bravely our earthly way, striving to serve God.

God is in our midst, and we hear those words of Jesus: "come and follow me." So we keep seeking to follow, to give our best gifts, and do God's good work, promoting the reign of God through this church and to the ends of the earth. May we keep going that way, today and forever. Amen.

**Prayer: It is that well-worn path, O God: mothers and fathers in the faith, fishermen by the lake, all those who have gone before us; You are entrusting us to follow and serve. We commit our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

**This sermon was preached as part of morning worship at Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Blacksburg, VA on Sunday, June 8, 2008 by Alex Evans, Pastor. This is a rough manuscript.**