

Gone Fishin'

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Norma, for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open at Luke 5, that would be helpful. Let's pray and ask for God's help. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Well, I don't know whether you're keen on fishing. I know people come from all over the world to fish in Scotland, so I'm guessing that we've got some very keen people, people, fishermen, fisherwomen in our church family.

I've only ever spent one day fishing in my life. I was in Thailand on holiday, and I signed up for a fishing trip where they took you out on a boat for the day, and you caught your fish, and then they were going to cook it up for lunch.

It sounded great to me. So we set out, and from my experience that day, there are three stages to fishing. The first stage is the wildly optimistic stage.

I was genuinely very excited about the idea of us catching our own lunch. The crew showed us how to get our bait ready and cast the fishing rods, and I was sitting there in beautiful sea thinking, this could be the start of a new thing for me.

[1 : 12] This could be very significant. This could be a new hobby for the whole of my life. I just can't wait to catch these fish. That was phase one. Then there was phase two, and phase two was the losing heart phase of fishing.

And that was when I realized that I wasn't really catching anything. Fishing didn't seem to work, so I got bored, I got disappointed, and I was getting hungry as well.

And after a couple of hours like that, I hit stage three of fishing. We got to lunchtime. We hadn't caught anything, and it turned out that was entirely predictable because the crew then brought out these cool boxes, and inside they had an alternative lunch, in case we hadn't caught anything, Thai green curry.

It was a huge relief. And so you could call phase three the moving on to something else phase of fishing, where it just involved giving up on fishing altogether, and instead thinking about my days, just a trip on the boat where we got a nice Thai green curry for lunch.

Not so bad, as long as you forget about the fishing. Now we're thinking this morning about evangelism, and evangelism is literally gospeling other people, sharing the gospel with them, the good news about who Jesus is and what he did, to see them respond with repentance and receive forgiveness of sins.

[2 : 31] And Jesus describes it in Luke 5 as fishing. Now we've just heard about that great resource we could use to cross the pain barrier and say to a friend, would you like to read the Bible with me?

But for lots of us, our evangelism, our spiritual fishing, runs a bit like my experience of fishing in Thailand. Some of us are in phase one, the wildly optimistic phase.

And if that's you, that is brilliant, but we need to listen to Jesus in Luke 5 if we're going to go the distance and keep fishing. Some of us are in phase two, the losing heart stage.

So we're still casting the fishing rod. We're still talking to friends about Jesus. We're meeting apathy, rejection, even anger, and we're starting to give up hope of me ever actually seeing a friend come to faith in Jesus.

And lots of us are in stage three, the Thai green curry stage, where we've basically moved on to other stuff. We will leave fishing to the gifted few, and we just focus our energy and our efforts on other things that seem a bit more effective.

[3 : 43] So we hear about a resource like the word one-to-one, and we think that sounds good for some people, but realistically, we can't really imagine using it ourselves with anybody else.

Or we hear about a monk's tale, the craft evening, the carol service, the guest service, but our friends definitely won't be there because just being realistic, we're not going to cross the pain barrier and invite them.

So we need to look again at Jesus calling Simon here in Luke 5. It's a wonderful scene, and it gives us three compelling reasons to get fishing. The first is, we should fish because it's Jesus' priority. The scene gets set in verse 1, if you have a look with me. One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. And you can see Jesus start to use the picture of fishing already in verses 2 and 3. He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets.

[4 : 46] He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. What's Jesus doing?

On one level, he's just being pragmatic, isn't he? The crowds are so big and they're mobbing him, he needs to get into a boat so that he can address more people from that place.

But clearly, he's also taking on the picture of fishing for the work that he is doing, of addressing the crowd to draw people into his kingdom. It's fishing.

But it's like the opposite of fishing, if you think about it. Because, of course, when you fish, when you catch fish for your own dinner, it's not good for the fish. The fish don't get a good deal from fishing, do they?

But this is the other way around. Jesus is catching people because they've got to get out of the lake. The world is the lake and it's the dominion of darkness.

[5 : 46] And the net is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus. And everyone who swims into his net and gets caught gets eternal life forever with him.

So how does he catch people? He catches them by proclaiming his word. Did you notice how Luke describes what the people are doing at the end of verse 1? They're listening to the word of God. In verse 3, he sits down, so he adopts the kind of posture of being a fisherman, but he's teaching people from the boat. Jesus can't catch you unless you hear the word of God.

And so his priority is to cast the net far and wide to give everyone a chance to get reeled in to be brought into his saving net. We can see that's Jesus' priority in the wider story.

Jesus, by this point, when you get to the end of chapter 4 of Luke, is having a phenomenal impact because people have realized this guy can cast out evil spirits and he can heal the sick.

[6 : 51] And so the whole town brings all the sick people. The hospitals are empty. People are clamoring to get Jesus, this man of power and compassion, to heal their sick friends and relatives.

And then, in verse 43, he says he's leaving. In chapter 4, verse 43, they beg him not to leave. And he says, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent.

And then he keeps on preaching. He fishes by proclaiming the word of God and fishing is his priority. And if that's his priority, it should be ours as well.

Recently, I watched the film Saving Mr. Banks. I don't know if you've seen that film. It's the back story to Mary Poppins. And Walt Disney, it turns out, had wanted to make a film of Mary Poppins for 20 years.

He even promised to one of his daughters that he would do it. But the author of the book, Miss Travers, is a very tough nut to crack. And she thinks that Disney is going to ruin her story and that her dad and the other characters in it are going to get mangled by the Hollywood machine.

[8 : 02] So he flies her out to California to kind of be allowed to consult on how the film will work. And that's what's going on in the movie Saving Mr. Banks. There's this great clash throughout the movie as she's confronted by everything Disney.

Anyway, one of the things that strikes you in this film is that around Walt Disney, everything gets done the Disney way. Everyone is enchanted by the way he does things and the way he wants things done.

So that when Miss Travers isn't taken in by Mickey Mouse and Disneyland, nobody can understand her. It's as though Walt Disney has established a DNA in every part of his empire and around him there's no cynicism about that.

So she goes into her hotel room and there's an enormous Mickey Mouse soft toy in the bed and there are Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse balloons everywhere. The receptionists love Disney.

They just think she's bound to love Disney. The chauffeur who drives her around everywhere, he loves Disney. The composers and the script writer for Mary Poppins will do anything Walt Disney says.

[9 : 08] Everyone in the Disneyland theme park is sold on doing things his way and he says it's the happiest place on earth and she can't deny it. So his priorities are reflected everywhere by everyone who works for him.

And in a similar way, when Jesus calls us to be his people, we do things his way. We're sold on him and how he does things. We want his priorities to be our priorities so that if he comes back today, we could think, yeah, it's in Silas as his people.

We were doing things Jesus' way. So telling our friends that, you know, I'm a Christian and I'd love to talk to you more about God and who God is and would you like to meet me to talk a bit more about that?

That might not be naturally what many of us would choose to do but Jesus is the king and we do it because we do things his way. That's our first reason to fish.

Secondly, we should fish because of Jesus' ability. Jesus wants us to trust that his great fishing project actually works.

[10 : 15] So he enacts a parable for us to prove that he is more than able to catch whoever he wants. He takes Simon fishing for fish. Have a look with me at verse 4.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. But Simon is still recovering from a bad day at the office, isn't he?

Verse 5. Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. sink. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? What are the limits on the catch? It's almost comedy, isn't it? Simon's crew in the boat frantically hauling in these fish. The nets are breaking.

[11 : 20] So they wave to the shore, their business partners come out, and they load and reload the boats until the boats are sinking. And friends, it's just a picture of what Jesus is doing in the world today with people.

That he is bringing in a catch, gathering people in. It's literally, it says, the nets enclosed a great multitude of fish.

It's the story of the whole Bible enacted out in a parable by Jesus. Ever since the fall, ever since the first people turned away from God, we have been a scattered people.

We see it in Genesis 11 with the Tower of Babel. People are scattered and disunited around the world. And Jesus is gathering people in to a new kingdom, bringing them back together and bringing them back to God.

So that in Revelation 7, verse 9, as the Apostle John in Revelation, he's given this vision of the future, and he says this as he looks ahead. He says, there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

[12 : 31] And they're singing, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Heaven is going to be net-burstingly, boat-sinkingly full because Jesus is really good at fishing.

And we fish because of his ability. Stanley Kubrick was a hugely renowned movie director. Platoon, Doctor Strangelove, Full Metal Jacket, Clockwork Orange, massive influence on movies.

He was also a complete recluse in later life and he wouldn't leave the UK. So he made a film just as he died, he made Eyes Wide Shut. And to make that movie, he brought Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman over to the UK.

They wanted to do a film with Stanley Kubrick, they couldn't do it anywhere else. So they had to come and live in the UK for two years. They're living in a country they don't normally live in. They're worried all the time about public exposure.

They can't really go out and do anything. And of course, when you're making a film, it's all made in the wrong order. They choose the scenes and they do the scenes in different ways and then some days they're getting up and Stanley Kubrick's saying, I want to redo that one again, it wasn't quite right.

[13 : 41] And it was really difficult for Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. And Tom Cruise said that there were days when they just thought, what on earth are we doing here? We're coming here, why are we here for two years?

We're going around in circles. And he said, we just had to keep telling ourselves we trust Stanley Kubrick. We know he can make great films. We know that he knows what he's doing.

So we'll stick with it. And for us today, we don't fish because we think we're especially good at it. We don't fish for people because we're seeing great results.

It's great if we are, but we might not be. But we fish for people because we know that Jesus is really good at fishing and we trust him. We fish in faith and we need to remember that.

Especially if we're fishing in Glasgow and we're in the losing heart stage of fishing. We can't see the big picture. We might be fishing at a particular place, a particular part of the lake where there aren't many fish to catch right now.

[14 : 46] But picture Simon and James and John and Andrew that day with their boats nearly sinking on the way back to the shore. Jesus saying to us and to them, I know what I'm doing.

When I want to catch people, I'll catch them. So we cross the pain barrier and say to a friend, are you interested? Would you come to this? Would you like to read the Bible with me?

In faith that across the world and across human history, Jesus knows what he's doing and the kingdom of heaven is going to be net bursting, boat sinking full of people.

So that's our second reason. We fish because of his ability. And our third reason why we fish comes next. We should fish because of Jesus' command. Simon sees the power and he's deeply convicted in verse 8.

He falls at Jesus' knees and he says, go away from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man. He's face to face with Christ and he's terrified by the power and the holiness.

[15 : 49] But Jesus looks at him and he responds with great gentleness in verse 10. Don't be afraid. From now on, you will fish for people.

So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. Don't be afraid. Simon thinks he's in great danger in front of Jesus.

The truth is, he's just another fish and Jesus is reeling him in. And to get caught in Jesus' net, you don't have to be a good person. You don't have to be a worthy person.

You don't have to be a religious person. You just have to let him catch you. You turn back to God, trusting in Jesus and that's you in the net. Don't be afraid. Just come to him.

But he also gives Simon this new job to do. From now on, you will fish for people. And Simon does it, doesn't he? I'm sure Simon would have been tempted to have said, Jesus, you're really good with these fish.

[16 : 49] You and I could do something quite special here on this lake. We should go into business together. But instead, he sees what Jesus wants him to do and he does it. It's what Jesus is still doing today and he does it through his disciples.

Now in one sense, what happens to Simon here is unique to him. No one else is Simon. And Simon is called to leave his net behind and most of us, when we're called to become Christians, we're not called to leave behind our jobs.

So there is something unique about him, but I'm persuaded that in another sense, what happens to Simon here is a model for every one of us. Because when Jesus saves you, he calls you to start fishing for people.

every disciple of Jesus is a fisherman. And that's really important for us to understand. At this stage in Luke's gospel, what happens to Simon here is a model of what Jesus is doing when he saves anybody.

You know, we've seen him preaching the word of God to the crowd and now we see a personal example, a model, of how he deals with an individual. Luke is zooming in, saying, this is what happens to you if you hear Jesus.

[17 : 58] And we see that same commission from Jesus repeated in Luke chapter 9 to someone totally different. Someone comes to Jesus, they've got an issue with following Jesus in Luke 9, and Jesus says to them, follow me, go and proclaim the word of God.

Sorry, go and proclaim the kingdom of God, he says. So following Jesus is about going and proclaiming the kingdom of God, speaking God's word to fish.

Not that we're all called to be preachers or ministers, certainly not, but we are all called to do everything we can to be part of Jesus' great fishing project in the world. We can't all be Bible teachers, we can all be Bible sharers. And we know that it's not just for Simon because it's what Jesus is still doing today. He's fishing through the word of God. In Luke chapter 24, the very last chapter of Luke, the risen Jesus says to his disciples that repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. We still need to do that.

[19 : 03] In Acts, Luke's second volume, we keep reading that the word of God continued to spread and the very last chapter of Acts ends with the apostle Paul in prison, but he's proclaiming the word of God.

And the last word in the book of Acts is the word unhindered. And it's about the word of God. Luke's saying the word of God is still going out unhindered. Jesus is still fishing by his word.

And so we fish because of his command. It's a challenging picture of the church, isn't it? That the church is a fishing boat. For those of us who've lost heart about fishing, we much prefer to think of church as an aquarium.

We spend all of our time and our effort on making things feel nice for the fish we've already got, including us. You know, like you do with an aquarium. You know, you get a new bridge after a while and you put it in the aquarium so it looks a bit prettier.

You might get a new filter so there's some nice bubbles in the aquarium. And we could spend all our time working to make church feel nice for the people already coming. We could spend our time grumbling about how this aquarium isn't how it used to be.

[20 : 12] It doesn't look as nice as it used to look. But church isn't an aquarium. It's a fishing boat. And Jesus wants to fish through us today.

So Simon is our perfect model in that. There are four key words that we've got to go away with this morning and they're back in verse 5. Simon says them in verse 5, four key words. He says, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything, but because you say so, I will let down the nets.

Because you say so, four great words that kill are excuses. I don't know about you, but I've got loads of excuses. Jesus, you just don't understand the culture in Glasgow.

You don't know how secular everyone is at the moment. Nobody's interested, Jesus. But because you say so, I'm going to let down the net. But Jesus, I'm very bad at this.

I'm not very good at it. I get tongue-tied. I get really nervous. I'm too scared that I'm going to lose a friend. I don't have many friends. I don't want to lose the ones I've already got. But because you say so, I'm going to fish.

[21 : 23] And Jesus deserves our obedience. Before he sends us out to be his fishermen, every one of us, first and foremost, is a fish.

For all of us had a time when we were like Simon. Jesus was out preaching near him. He's just cleaning his nets. And then Jesus got into his boat.

And he came face to face with Christ. And it's true for all of us. We're going about life at some stage, living our life away from him. And at some stage, Jesus got into your boat.

And like Simon, we should have been terrified. But because of his death in our place, he says to each one of us, don't be afraid. Follow me.

It's wonderful, his grace. And we stand in that grace. Even if you never share your faith with anyone, he has saved you if you trust him and you are one of his. You are a fish. So I don't know how you felt as we looked at this resource, the word one-to-one.

[22 : 31] I don't know how you feel about inviting people to a monk's tale or the craft night or the carol service. You might be someone who was thinking, realistically, that's not for me. I'm never going to invite my friends.

We're in the Thai green curry phase of fishing. We'll leave the lock to somebody else. But let me just ask, would you have a go? Together, could we go fishing for people?

The worst thing that could possibly happen is that people say no and they think you're weird. They probably already think you're weird. And we go fishing for three reasons.

Because of Jesus' priority, because of his ability, and most of all, because of his command. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came preaching the word of God to save.

We thank you that you stepped into our boats, that you reeled us in for your words of compassion. Don't be afraid. Follow me. Help us, moved by your grace, in the power of your spirit, to do all that we can to join your great fishing project today.

[23 : 50] And through us, we pray that you will catch many for their salvation, for our great joy, and for your glory. Amen. Amen.