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Sermon Title: Yet If You Say So

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Focus Text:

"Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Prayer of Illumination: God of steadfast love and faithfulness, we are grateful for the gift of the Scripture. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to hear your word with understanding, that we may know good news and share it with others, in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen

Sermon:

Have you ever had one of those days? One of those work so hard your fingertips down to your pinky toes ache? And you have one last task to lay it all down and go home for a small meal and a long, long rest. Simon and his crew were there. It had been a long, empty net by empty net drug up slowly, fruitless night, as Simon and his partners had had in attempting to fish overnight. They are in the midst of their final task to truly call it a day, or is it a night?

They are cleaning their nets.

And He stops on the beach, as the sun is rising over the horizon. A hazy figure with what looks like a crowd of people creating a cloud dust slowly trailing behind and he asks a favor. Can he use their boat to create some distance, a natural stage and not so steady wooden boat podium to address the crowd? And Simon having met this man before, even seen him in miraculous action healing his mother-in-law, agrees.

Simeon and his boat crew will row out a bit and allow Jesus to speak to the crowd. Maybe at this point Simon thought they'd be even. He could endure just a little while longer and let this man, as amazing teacher, healer, and potential prophet be in his presence but that was it. Simeon was done and so desperately wanted to go home.

I wonder was Simon paying attention to what Jesus was teaching that day? Did Simon have any comprehension about what Jesus was about to do to his life?

I've always wondered that, for men like Simon, people like Simon, has there been that moment in your own life? That moment, completely unwarranted, and most likely inconvenient that changed everything? That time when the dream college acceptance letter came in the mail, except it wasn't. That lifetime of dedicating your time, energy, your life to a job and then in one email, it is gone. That late night, clarity that a marriage, a relationship at one time was filled with love and vows of a lifetime has instead become heartache and not enough, so it is indeed done? I wonder where the Holy Spirit is in those moments. Where you able to feel it's whisper of 'it's going to be okay"? Did you feel a sense of peace and a small flutter of hope, pickle those hairs on the back of your neck, that something even greater is just around the corner?

Yet, I am sure for most of us the answer is as the British say, excuse my crassness, "Not bloody likely!"

It is this indignant and immediate rebellion I hear as the inner dialogue of Simon exactly when Jesus asks Simon and company to complete one more task, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” The language that must have been going off in Simon's head, the excuses, the complete reluctance to do as this stranger, this 'has he even picked up a net before and fished, man' ask of them all to go out., to the deep water, to the dangerous, exhausting work of rowing out to deep water and throw their nets out? The age-old adage coming to mind, “Those that can, do; those that can’t, teach,” wanting to shout out, 'no.'

All of this running through the boat crews head too, and only Simon speaks, as I also see Simon, as little bit of a smart mouth, these words come out of his mouth instead, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

"Yet if you say so"….so much hinging in those 5 little words, for many commentators, they see this turn as a sign of Simon's obedience, Simon's trust in the Lord, maybe but I also see something else.

I see a man, as in the Gospel of Luke and especially the Gospel of John, I see someone who informed by his past, a man who as a First Century Galilean fisherman has been wrestling, bare-knuckling, holding tightly to that little bit of freedom, hope, and life that he can. A Galilean fisherman, who may be owns his own boat, but barely. He most likely owns money to the families that weaved and pieced those precious nets together, to a stonemason for the anchors, to the dock owners to lease a space for this boat, to the basket weavers and repairmen on those precious boats. To those workers on his boat and because, Simon is also a dreamer of bigger things, the second. To Herod and Roman authorities, taxes on ability to fish as well as those fish, or imaginary fish, because that night they had come up with nothing. Absolutely nothing and who knew if tomorrow as going to be any different and yet…

With every fiber of Simon's being telling him to take this lunatic back to the beach and literally wash his hands of all of all it, he indicates to his crew, maybe with a silent, reluctant nod, go ahead. They let the nets down.

And maybe you've seen the artwork, there is a famous painting of this moment. This astounding moment, when those fishermen realize their nets are not coming up empty, their nets are bulging, staining with a momentous catch, Simon's boat has to call the second out to haul it all in. This altarpiece, commissioned by the Flemish fisherman guild of Mechelen, Belgium by Peter Paul Rubens in their chapel in the Church of Our Lady-across-the-Dyle vibrantly comes alive as you see these fishmen straining to pull up the nets in deep reds and blues in a still crashing sea. These fishermen are heaving and hauling, in the moment of pulling up an abundance. Historic records also provide a little whimsy as Ruben used the guild's own fishmen as models for our Biblical fishermen. Yet centered, almost oblivious to what is happening around them, is this next moment between Simon and Jesus. That moment when everything changed.

Peter had though he knows Jesus, he thinks he's seen all of Jesus' tricks, but he only now realizes that he really *doesn’t* know him, that he’s only just beginning to realize what and who Jesus is, and that it scares him a little. That moment when he says aloud what he is actually thinking that moment when how he saw his life unfolding isn't as clear or as dark as the night was when that

empty boat pulled up to shore. That moment when Peter speaks from his heart, ""Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Even his address of Jesus changes too, no longer is this man, "Master", a title for a stranger or one above him in station whom he doesn't really know but, "Lord."

One commentator catches this change in Peter too, as they say "It's easy, I suppose, to attribute Peter's confession to a lack of self-esteem, or an appropriate confession of sinfulness in the presence of the sinless One. But I think that each time we experience sheer grace, we are simultaneously joyful and a little afraid, struck by how much more we've received than we deserve or even imagined. Wondering how such blessings came our way and realizing we are caught up in something so much bigger than ourselves.[1]"

When did the blessing of a life-changing moment, was one you actually recognized as such for yourself? The door closing of one college's rejection, opened a veranda to where you truly belonged? The ending of one chapter of a career freed you to pursue a dream, you'd been daydreaming about or truly experience family, friends, adventure in retirement? That ending of one relationship that wasn't a good fit to be there, be available when an even better one began to blossom? The realization that you don't have to any of this alone?

Simon was able to let go of all those pass failures and truly see the possibilities limitless with the Lord. And oh, what possibilities he would experience, even the smart-mouth, speak before he thinks, Simon who would be renamed Peter, the Rock upon whom the church would be build. A sinner with wonder, dreams and hope whose horizons were just beginning to turn golden. He wasn't hauling those fish in alone and he wasn't alone in the next fishing trip either.

He experienced Jesus as Life and like Simon Peter, we are too invited into the boat, to experience this life, this koinonia as an adventure with new seas to explore, together.

Amen

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[1] *From <https://www.davidlose.net/2019/02/epiphany-5-c-lots-to-love/> "Epiphany 5 C: Lots of Love" David Lose, Dear Partner in Preaching. February 5, 2019. Accessed February 5, 2025.*