

## LAUNCH OUT

Luke 5:1-11

These interesting events recorded in this passage took place on the peaceful shore of the Sea of Galilee, or, as the Romans preferred to call it, the Lake of Gennesaret, that famous body of water near which some of our Lord's most wonderful words were spoken and some of His most wonderful works were done.

Early one morning the mists were rising from the Sea of Galilee. The fishermen who had been out on the lake all night were beginning to bring their boats to the shore. Already two boats had landed, and the fishermen were washing the seaweed and debris from their nets. One of them, Simon, worked in silence. He was disappointed and tired. He had fished all night and had caught nothing. For him fishing was not a sport, but a means of earning a livelihood.

While Peter, James and John were washing their nets, preparatory to the day's rest and the next night's fishing, the crowd was gathering along the shore. Since the shore of the lake was one of the favorite spots in which Christ preached, people would gather early in the morning in order to hear Him speak before their daily tasks claimed their attention and the heat of the day became oppressive. On this particular morning the crowd was larger than usual. Due to the presence of the clamorous multitude, Christ walked down to the water's edge, approached Simon Peter, stepped into his boat and asked him if he would row out a few feet in order to give Him a better vantage point from which to speak to the crowd. Simon did so very readily, and without any question.

From that strange pulpit, trembling in the water, encircled with the majesty of the hills, with the mighty dome of the heavens above Him, the beautiful waters of blue Galilee at His feet and the birds of the air for His choristers, Christ preached to the people in terms which they could understand. He illustrated truth by simple incidents taken from their daily lives.

When our Lord had finished His message, and the crowd was beginning to disperse, Christ suddenly turned to Simon Peter and said, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Simon was taken by surprise, but there was something about Christ which made him want to do His bidding. In his memorable answer he said, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." So, tired as he was, he pulled his boat out into the deep water and let down the net.

In response to Christ's command to "launch out into the deep" Simon Peter might have said, "Who is he that he should try to tell me how to run my life and my business? After all, I'm the fisherman in this boat. I grew up on the shores of this lake. I have fished in these waters ever since I was old enough to handle the net. Who is he that he thinks he has the right to tell me what to do?" If that had been his response, Simon would have missed out on the biggest catch of his life as a fisherman.

Or Simon might have said, "He has no right to ask this of me now. He knows I'm tired. He knows I have fished all night and have caught nothing. I want to go home, get some breakfast and some sleep. If I were rested, it might be different. What right does he have to ask me now to launch out into the deep?" If Simon had refused to go, he would have failed to catch the greatest number of fish he had ever taken.

Or Simon Peter might have said, "Master, that is a good idea. That is exactly what I plan to do -- later." Thus he might have postponed his decision to do the Master's bidding, and, if he had, he would have missed out on one of the greatest moments of his career as a fisherman.

Each of these possible reactions to Christ's request has its counterpart in our day. There are those, for example, who fail to launch out with Christ today because of their love for the world, so they miss out on the greatest joys and most deeply satisfying faith and hope this life can offer.

Today great multitudes frankly say to Christ, "Let us alone, for it is better that we should die in our sins than that we should lose out on the pleasures and promises of the world." These people make two mistakes. They overestimate the power of sin to give them pleasure. People who live to indulge in the pleasures of this world usually are disappointed. Frequently they become bitter as they come to realize that what seemed so indispensable to their happiness has not fed their souls and has robbed them in the end of the very happiness they sought.

The second mistake these people make is to under-estimate the joys of the Christian life. They think that Christians are people who do not have a good time in life. A Christian should be the happiest person on earth. The joys of the Christian give new happiness every time one experiences or recalls them, and they point to the heavenly joys to come.

What a tragedy that so many try to reach out in both directions at once! They want the joys of the Christian life, but are not willing to forego the pleasures of sin. They forget that God is the author of all true joy, and that when one gives himself to God he knows happiness without remorse and a joy that will never end. Many want to trust God, but they also want the tangible support of this world's approval. They want the glow, but they are not willing to "let go, and let God" become the object of their quest and obedience. So they stay in the shallows of superficial commitment. They never venture out very far in prayer, or service, or stewardship, and then wonder why they catch only minnows of satisfaction.

Peter's reply, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net," is one of the finest expressions of obedience to Christ that was ever recorded. It was both unhesitating and unquestioning. He frankly expressed his willingness to do as Christ had bidden him. His statement is one of the finest expressions of unhesitating obedience to Christ that was ever recorded. In spite of physical exhaustion, Peter unhesitatingly obeyed Christ. Even though the prospect of catching fish in the daytime was remote, Peter promptly yielded to the will of Christ. The word of the Lord was final with him.

At our Lord's bidding, the disciples went back where they had failed, let down their nets and "enclosed a great multitude of fishes." What turned their failure into success? It was simply venturing out and acting on the word of the Lord. The Master had spoken and that was enough. Faith in Christ and obedience to Him means victory. He never deceives any who trust and obey Him.

There was something exceedingly beautiful and touching about the way in which they accepted, believed and obeyed His word and at His command proceeded to do a work which their reflection, observation and experience would have assured them to be useless.

On the pathway of obedience that morning Peter received a new vision of himself -- his littleness and his unworthiness. He cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." There is no place for pride or self-sufficiency as we travel the pathway of obedience. He also received a new vision of Christ. To him the Lord loomed larger and more wondrous than ever before. Upon their arrival on the shore, the disciples left all and followed Him.

Today many Christians refuse to launch out into the deep in faith in Christ because they are afraid that He will demand too much of them. It is true that being a Christian makes demands upon our lives. Some things must be given up if one is to follow Christ. There are some disciplines that a Christian must accept. All of us live in obedience to somebody. The person who thinks that he can live free of all obedience is living under a tragic misapprehension. The important thing is to know whom and what we must obey in order to achieve the greatest fulness in life.

There are two kinds of obedience. One is servile and the other is creative. The first is the kind demanded by a dictator; the second is the kind that is expected by a father. The one is a demonstration of authority; the other is a means of guidance. When a father sends his child to school, he is not being mean. He is simply doing what is necessary for the mental growth of his child. God asks for our obedience as a Father, and never as a dictator. He knows that we must obey if we are to achieve fulness of life. God uses a harness of love. We all have to wear a harness of obedience to somebody or something, but it makes all the difference in the world whether love or some other force is holding the reins. Passion can drive with a relentless hand, and lash us into a frenzy of despair. Ambition can drive us beyond our endurance. But love drives with a considerate hand. It seeks to guide us in the direction we must go if we are to know real fulness of life.

Whenever we launch out in faith with Christ, He has some wonderful surprises in store for us. This does not mean we will not suffer. This does not mean that we can never fail. It does mean that when we put our lives fully at His disposal, He will fill our nets to overflowing with evidences of His love.

Christ is still calling, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your net." We cannot catch fish and stay tied to the shore. We cannot claim the promises of God and not venture out upon the will of God. The Word is clear: "Launch out, and let down the net." If we would know a peace that cannot be measured, we must be willing to say, "Nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net."