

“A Super Big Fish Story”

Rev. Robert H. Wade

February 7, 2010

Luke 5:1-11

On this Super Bowl Sunday we will be looking at a super big fish story in the Gospel of Luke. As we read this story that takes place on the Sea of Galilee, I invite you to be thinking about the real miracle in this fishing story from long ago.

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

....The Word of the Lord....Thanks be to God!

Quite often we only see miracles in those things that defy nature like the catch of fish that filled two boats and ***“so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.”*** That is pretty miraculous but it’s not the real miracle of this fish story.

The miracle I'm thinking of began to take shape when Jesus climbed into Simon's boat and asked him to push off from shore so he could use Simon's boat for a pulpit. That was Simon's first yes. Remember that Simon was tired from working all night, he was disgusted that he caught no fish....remember fishing was his livelihood....his family depended on Simon's catch....and who was this preacher man to infringe on his time and property anyway? But Simon said yes and allowed Jesus the use of his boat.

After preaching, Jesus decided to go fishing and asked Simon to take the boat out into the deep water and throw his nets into the deep. Simon finally protests, "***Master we have fished all night long and have caught nothing.***" It's like Simon was objecting, "*I know my business. Fish are caught at night....we gave it a good try but we came up empty handed. Can't you just leave it at that?*" The miracle continues when Simon doesn't give into his frustration and fatigue but says, "***Yet if you say so I will let down the nets.***" And we know the rest of the story about the net breaking haul of fish.

The real miracle took place when Simon took in the scene and saw two fishing boats loaded so full that they were almost sinking....the real miracle took place when Simon fell at Jesus' feet and begged Jesus to leave because he was a sinner. The real miracle couldn't be seen that day because the real miracle was Simon's transformed heart. Simon knew that he was in the presence of Someone greater than he.....Someone who out fished he and his professional fishermen buddies.....Someone in whose presence he felt vulnerable, humble and in awe. In this encounter on the sea Simon came to the conclusion that he wasn't in control and he had a lot to learn. I've heard it said that *humility is a readiness to learn*. Simon was ready to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Philip Yancey tells of having supper with an Amish family and, in the course of the conversation, he heard of the unusual process the Amish use to call a pastor. "***The entire congregation votes for any male members who show pastoral potential, and those who receive at least three votes move forward to sit at a table. Each has a hymn book in front of him, and inside his randomly chosen hymn book one of the men finds a card designating him as the new pastor. For the next year he gets to preach two sermons a week, averaging ninety minutes in length.***"

‘What if the person selected doesn’t feel qualified?’ I asked my Amish friend. He look puzzled, then replied, ‘If he did feel qualified, we wouldn’t want him. We want a humble man, one who looks to God.’”

--Grace Notes, p. 28.

This honoring of humility and looking to God to become qualified seems so odd especially on this Super Bowl Sunday when we honor the survival of the fittest and the most qualified. We are all attracted to the brightest, strongest, and most talented but there is a danger for disciples of Jesus Christ when we put our eggs in the “I am qualified basket.” It’s called *pride* and pride directs attention on *self*.

We all live on a spectrum somewhere between feeling unqualified or inferior to feeling that we are the Super Bowl MVP. *Wouldn’t it be a blessing if those who naturally feel losers would begin each day with the reassurance that they are precious in God’s sight? Wouldn’t it be a blessing if those who naturally feel like winners would begin each day with a thank you to God for gifting them and the prayer “Lord, here I am and here are the gifts you have given me for your service?”*

The miracle of life begins on our knees!

Kneeling in the presence of God, Simon expressed his fear of Jesus to the point of asking him to go away. What happens when we stare into the bright light of the Son.....we want to hide and duck for cover.

Dr. William Willimon, former Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, speaks wisely when he writes, ***“There are at least two ways to be terrified of God. Either you can be afraid of God because God is so harsh and cruel that you dare not slip up for fear of punishment, or God may be so wonderfully loving that you despair of all the ways you have betrayed that love in your own way of life. God’s love is the searing light that penetrates our human façade.”*** [Pulpit Resource, Logos Publications, 1997]

All too many people think of God as the Celestial Cop who is just waiting for us to make a mistake so God can slap the cuffs on us. But there is such a thing as reverent fear in which we know that we are standing in the presence of Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all of life and we know that the Light pierces our façade of respectability.

Peter no doubt felt that reverent fear as knelt in the presence of Jesus. But Peter's fear soon faded and was replaced with an awesome sense of God's love, grace and mercy as he heard Jesus say, **"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."**

¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The real miracle that day wasn't two boat loads of fish but was the conversion of a hard nosed fisherman into a follower of Jesus Christ. Simon was the big catch of the day!

Amen