

The Call of Peter¹

I'm struck as I think about this episode with Jesus and Peter how much Jesus gets into Peter's life. Here's what I mean by that. Jesus encounters a crowd by the lake. Supposedly, to get some distance from the crush of the crowd, Jesus gets into one of two fishing boats that happen to be on hand. The boat happens to belong to Simon Peter, who was a fisherman. Now, we've met Simon. Several verses before this we read that Jesus entered Simon's house and healed his mother-in-law.

Suddenly, we have a bit of a pattern. Jesus is appropriating Simon's stuff—his house and now his boat—for use in his ministry. It's worth noting that Jesus doesn't say, "Simon, since you're not using the boat, would it be possible for me to use it?" The text simply tells us that Jesus got into the boat. The intrusion continues. Once in the boat, Jesus makes another request. "Oh, Simon, give me a bit of a push so I can get off shore. Just wade in up to your waist. That's good, right there. Thanks so much."

This goes on. The story ignores whatever Jesus says to the crowd. He may have preached a sermon like the Sermon on the Mount. But the thread of this story doesn't indicate anything about what the masses of people learned from Jesus or how they

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reacted. The story is focused on the boat and the fishermen. It's as if Jesus finishes with the crowd and calls Simon and his partners over and says, "Okay, I'm done. Now climb into the boats and row out onto the water. We're going fishing."

A little fishing background for that body of water is illuminating. I understand that the lake drops off abruptly just a few feet from the water's edge. Additionally, the fish that inhabit that lake are near the surface at night and run deep in the day light. The kind of net used was skillfully flung so to spread out and cover a little area. The weighted edges sank fast and enclosed whatever fish were present. It was basically a nighttime shallow water operation.

Jesus' instructions to go out into the deep water were doubly nonsensical. The nets weren't for deep water, nor were the fish near the surface.

So when I suggest that Jesus is getting into Simon Peter's life, that observation was especially true as Jesus attempts to get the professional fishermen to get back out after an unsuccessful night of work, and cast nets in precisely the area that everyone knew was empty of fish. Peter is surprisingly gracious. He basically says, "Whatever you say, boss."

Now we know the rest of the story. A great school of fish is present just where the fishermen least expected them, and

their net comes back loaded. The place where they cast their net must have been swarming with fish!

All of this has a pretty big impact on Peter who of course casts himself down at Jesus' feet. And it is at this point that Peter gives up fishing entirely and follows Jesus as a disciple—an apprentice to Jesus' work.

Here's the point I want to lift up. Peter doesn't follow Jesus because he was persuaded by a set of ideas, or because a light went off in his heart. Simon recognizes and follows Jesus because of the way that Jesus got tangled up with Peter's daily life and Peter's stuff—his boat and nets and craft and partners and even the fish. Jesus uses stuff.

I realize that we've finished the sermons about the hereafter—what happens after you die and what will happen to the world. One of my big discoveries is that the life to come is much like the life we have. It's "this-worldly" to coin a phrase. We have the same theme in this lesson. Jesus is using simple stuff carry a spiritual message. Simon sees a bunch of fish and suddenly understands something about Jesus. Simon loans his boat and suddenly he's becoming a disciple.

This all makes me wonder what it might be like for us if Jesus got into our lives. What would his intrusion into our daily existence spell for us? What does he see among our

possessions that he would borrow? How would he direct you and me to conduct our daily affairs?—even though we think we can handle our own daily affairs thank you very much!

I've probably mentioned Joyce Landorf Heatherly in the past. Joyce is a widely known and published inspirational author and speaker from Austin Texas. She tells a personal story that fits into today's thought. Joyce's daughter, Laurie, was engaged in an unhappy love relationship. For four years the struggle continued. Then, in November of the fourth year, Joyce prayed and kind of told God that at Thanksgiving the family would confront Laurie about the relationship. They wanted to ask her to break off the devastating relationship. The idea was sensible enough. The family just didn't want to stand by and watch Laurie destroy herself. Joyce prayed for the right words. The Lord spoke clearly. Don't say a word.

Joyce didn't follow those instructions. She had her little "intervention" with her daughter, who walked out of their lives for several years. It strikes me that God's guidance, "Don't confront your daughter," sounded in the ears of a mother much like let down your nets in the deep sounded to professional fishermen." So, back to the question: What if we were to let Jesus get into our lives and offer us his instructions?

The same principle applies to our possessions or what we have influence over. How might Jesus want to use our special talents, our money, our experience, the college major that we never pursued, our friendships, our homes or our spare time? Imagine praying and listening for what Jesus needs among our stuff!

Did you know that Jesus spends more time talking about possessions than about prayer? This emphasis may be because God very much works through material things; the stuff of this world; our everyday lives and our everyday possessions. And because this is true, you and I, like Simon Peter, may well discover that as we place our stuff at Christ's disposal, we come to recognize who he is.