

Luke 5:1-11

**The Rock©
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Rev. Dr. Sharlyn Gates

Today is the second Sunday in Lent and we just got started last Wednesday on our Bible Study on Simon Peter – a study written by Reverend Adam Hamilton, who pastors one of the largest United Methodist Church’s in the US – the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City. He was the founding pastor of that church.

If you are just now deciding to join the study group, please do so. It is definitely not too late and you can easily catch up.

Our ultimate goal in this study is to learn about discipleship through one of Jesus’ strongest, most talked about disciples – Simon Peter. All of the gospels mention Simon Peter more than any of the other disciples. A few of the other disciples are mentioned 10 to 20 times, compared to Simon Peter who is mentioned over 120 times in the gospels. Simon Peter is also the leading figure in the first half of the book of Acts – the Acts of the Apostles.’

Simon was a fisherman. He most likely grew up as a fisherman, following in his father’s footsteps. He is Simon bar Jonah – or – Simon, son of Jonah, which is also translated as John. The ancient name for Simon was pronounced Shimon – which means “to hear” or “to listen.” It comes from all the way back to the time of Deuteronomy 6 and what is called “The Shema.” *Hear – or Listen – O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

This is known as the greatest commandment and it was taught diligently from generation to generation.

So Simon – Shimon – was named a name that meant *to listen or hear*. It’s interesting, isn’t it – how so many names in the Bible reflect the character of the person? Simon – a listener, or one who hears.

The gospel of John tells us that the very first time Simon met Jesus was when his brother, Andrew, was listening to John the Baptist preach. And then Jesus came along and John (who was Jesus’ cousin) said, “here is the lamb of God!” And Andrew and some of the others started following Jesus.

Andrew went and told his brother, Simon, about Jesus and so Simon went along to meet him. That’s when Jesus said to Simon from now on you will be called Peter – or Cephas – which means ROCK.

Later, Jesus would tell Peter that he would be the Rock on which his church would be built. Simon Peter – the one who listens, the one who hears – would be the first one – the Rock – to build the Christian church. The first church being the Catholic church of which he was the founder.

So, here was Peter. He was a fisherman. He was ordinary. He was, in fact, considered by many of the more elite as being an *am ha'erez* – a man of the earth. A common man. As lowly as a Gentile really. Not a person of means but a man who worked hard for a living. Uneducated.

Simon Peter was what we might call the salt of the earth. He was married to a young woman and they lived in Capernaum with his wife and her mother, whom Jesus healed early on. He was strong and young. He was ordinary with many weaknesses and faults. But he was faithful in following Jesus.

In the video we saw the place in the Holy Land that is where they believe Peter's house was. And it was basically the home of Jesus after he left Nazareth. Jesus, of course, traveled by foot many miles with his disciples. But he made his home base in Capernaum at the home of Simon Peter.

So here is Simon Peter, just in from an all night fishing job. He and his companions are bone tired and probably pretty discouraged. They had been working hard all night but they didn't have much to show for it. Hardly any fish to speak of.

In those days there were three types of fishing that were prevalent. Sometimes one fished with a fishing rod and line in the day time so you could see the fish. Of course, it would be very hard to make much of a living catching one fish at a time.

Another way of fishing was to cast a net into the water, from the shore, and pull it in, hoping for a bunch of fish to be there in the net. One could sometimes have good luck with this way of fishing.

But the most popular way of fishing for a living was for two boats to go out into the night when the fish could not see the net and to drag a net between the two boats. This way they often would catch a good amount of fish to haul to the shore. Often times, the fishermen would put a lantern on a float in the water so the fish would gather around the light and then the fishermen would come along with a net and get the fish.

Unfortunately, it wasn't always successful. And if this was your livelihood it would be discouraging to be out all night and not have much to show for it. And that was the case this morning when Jesus came along.

Simon Peter and his companions had gotten back to shore and were about to call it quits. They had cleaned their nets. They were tired and sleepy and discouraged.

But picture this: Here comes Jesus with, of course, a group of people crowding him, wanting to see him and hear what he had to say. And Jesus sees Simon Peter's boat and so he just borrows it. He goes and steps in and asks Peter to row a little distance.

Can't you imagine how Peter was feeling. I mean really. You're so dog tired and you are ready to go home and sleep. And yet, here is Jesus, this teacher just getting into your boat and asking

you to row out so people can hear him. And so, of course, you really have no choice. You row out.

Now Jesus is pretty smart. Not only does he go out a distance, using the benefit of the water as a sounding board so people can hear him, but he also has the captured attention of Simon Peter. I mean, Simon can't just lay back and sleep with all those people looking at him. He would, of course, want to seem alert. And, with his name meaning *to listen or hear* he surely heard the powerful words of Jesus.

But he was tired. So very tired. Have you ever just been so ready to call it a day? You didn't think you could take one more thing to add to the day? Like a waitress who has finally come to the end of the shift. Finally served the last table and given them the check. You are just sure this is it.

And then walks in another group of people. And the policy is that whoever comes in before the doors are locked will be served. And they sit in your designated spot of service.

Or, like when I served as a hospital chaplain. I was the only on-call chaplain that night. And that night was particularly difficult. I had four deaths to tend to that night. Two of them were very traumatic. Nurses were irritated at me for not getting to their floor as soon as they wanted me there.

Finally, the time to hand over the on-call beeper was about to arrive. At 7 am I would give it all to another chaplain and go home to sleep. But then, just before 7, the pager went off and I had another call to deal with. And I remember feeling like I possibly would not be able to get through that last one – working with a family in trauma. Staying with them until they finally went out the front door, me walking with them and assuring them of what would be next.

I imagine Simon Peter felt a bit like this. So tired he thought he could not push on into the day. I imagine when Jesus told him to row the boat out further, he surely was quietly protesting. And yet he did it. For Jesus.

But then, after Jesus taught the crowd, then Jesus told him to row out into the deep waters and let down the nets.

Here we get the beginning of an excuse not to do what Jesus says. "Master," Simon Peter says, "we've been out all night and we've not caught anything."

In other words, we don't see the point in going out now. It is broad daylight, after all.

But then, Peter says this: ... but because you say so, I will do it."

Because you say so. Because Jesus said so. Simply the best reason ever, right?

So, here's what I want us to think about. The difference between shallow water and deep water. Where do you feel the safest?

In bible study, most of us agreed that it felt easier and safer in the shallow waters. The deep waters take more effort to stay afloat. It takes a lot energy and perseverance. It is more frightening because it is so unknown.

When I asked, at Bible Study, where the shallow waters versus the deep waters were in ministry, one person said that it is easy to come to church and worship. It is easy to be with other people in the fellowship of believers – enjoying the conversations and the laughter.

But that person said it feels like deep waters to come to a bible study when, while you are a person of faith, you really don't know much about studying the Bible and it feels intimidating to speak up. Deep waters indeed.

Another person said that it is safe – shallow – to help someone for a first and only time. It's pretty easy to give someone help and then to move on. But the deep waters would be like going to a city to serve large groups of people who are destitute. One would not know for sure what was safe and what was not.

I tend to think that sharing our faith, telling others about God's love and plan of salvation, feels like, for many of us, that we are sailing out into deep, unknown waters.

And yet, Jesus not only called Simon Peter to follow him on this great adventure of discipleship but that he would make him fishers of people.

So this week think about these things:

How have I experienced adventure through following Christ?

Does being his disciple give me such great joy that I just have to share it with other? If not, why?

What excuses do come up with to not do what you hear Jesus ask?

What blessings do you find when you do like Peter, as tired as you might be, yet because Jesus says so you do it.

How am I a flawed but faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?