

There is a fish story in Luke’s Gospel that outdoes any other fish story we’ve ever heard before or since. But, strangely enough, Simon Peter’s reaction to that record catch of fish was *fear*. Let’s take a look at the biblical scene as portrayed in the *Jesus* movie that I show our Confirmation Class. [Video clip]

The events leading to this particular fishing tale are fast-moving and attention-getting. First, Jesus reads scripture and speaks in the synagogue, where his hearers are both confounded and offended. Next, an evil spirit is driven out of a deranged man. In the home of Simon Peter, Jesus restores the big fisherman’s mother-in-law to health.

This attracts a whole flock of people with physical ailments, all of whom are healed. In the wake of all these hectic activities, we find Jesus teaching and preaching at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. Two boats have just come in, and the fishermen are washing their nets. The sight gives Jesus an idea for crowd control.

He steps into Simon’s boat and, pushing out from land, continues to teach and preach. In a similar situation today, the preacher would probably send out for portable sound system. Jesus demonstrates for us here and in many other situations that we are to make use of whatever is at hand, those resources already in place which will work for God’s purposes.

Simon’s boat becomes the platform from which Jesus can teach and preach, but afterward he had a plan to reward him. He then suggests that they put out to sea and let down their nets for a catch. Peter was skeptical. He explained that they had already fished all night with no luck. Anybody in the fishing business knows that the time to catch fish is not in broad daylight with the sun glaring on the water and spooking the fish. Simon did as Jesus asked, but we can imagine what was going through his mind. “Lord, you may be able to cast out demons and heal the sick and preach with authority. You know about spiritual things, *but I know about fishing*. Fishing is my life!”

We can understand Peter’s reaction. Imagine, if you will, that the most godly person you have ever met—be it a pastor, teacher, friend, or family member—began to tell you how to do your job better. It would be like Mother Teresa visiting your place of business and saying, “I see from your financial records you only did five million dollars’ worth of business last year. You’re missing some obvious market share. Let me show you some things you can do to earn fifty million dollars next year.” We’d like to think we would react well in that situation, but I have a hunch we might be just as likely to say, “Listen, Mother, stick to helping the poor and I’ll take care of my business.”

Fortunately, Peter, expecting only failure, obeys Jesus. They head out, put down the nets and reap the biggest catch in Peter’s career. The weight of it is breaking the nets, and they have to draft their partners in the second boat to join them and help with the haul. This, for me, suggests that there is no division between the sacred and the secular in the mind of God. We may accept Jesus as the one who forgives our sins and saves our souls and reconciles us to God, *but is it possible that he knows the intricacies of our job better than we do?*

Peter is terrified by his instant success. Did you see the face of the actor portraying Simon Peter in the film clip? Jesus speaks to him, as he does to us: “*Don’t be afraid.*” And he goes on to call him and his

companions to a more important work, work more exciting than catching a ton of fish. They are, in the future, to catch men and women, boys and girls—to capture the hearts and minds of people for the Kingdom of God. But in the end, the biggest catch of their lives was insignificant in the light of the new call to be a part of Jesus’ special band for the next three years.

Peter’s unexpected success made him fearful, and that’s the very point we want to see here. There are people who have a chronic feeling of inadequacy that leads to fear. I’m sure those patterns start early in life. Counselors, psychiatrists, physicians, tell us that there are those people who determine they will never be confident or sure about anything in life. This kind of fear of inadequacy can affect any of us.

Bruce Larson says: One test they give children involves tossing rope rings around a peg set in a wooden block. The instructions are deliberately sketchy. The children are given the rings and told that the point of the game is to get the rings over the peg. Some children set the peg down right in front of them, drop the ring over the peg and win every time. They are terrified of failure and play in a way that assures their success. That behavior takes all the fun out of the game, but they can’t lose. Another group puts the peg at a reasonable distance and sometimes they win and sometimes they lose. But they understand that is the challenge of the game. Then there are the children who put the pegs so far away that they can’t possibly reach them. They give themselves no chance. That behavior, unfortunately, follows them through life. They choose unsatisfying mates and unrewarding jobs which seem to insure they can wallow in their unworthiness.

Most of you know that the *Peanuts* cartoon is my all-time favorite, and Charles Schultz, who wrote the cartoon strip often zeroes in on this dilemma. One cartoon has Lucy saying to Charlie Brown, “You know, life is like an ocean liner. Some people take their deck chair and put it at the stern, to see where they have been, and some put their deck chair on the bow, to see where they are going. Charlie Brown, tell me, where do you want to put your deck chair?” He says, “I can’t even unfold my deck chair.” Charlie Brown, the eternal loser, has an inordinate fear of inadequacy. There are a lot of people out there who, like Charlie Brown, enjoy kicking themselves once in a while, and they especially enjoy hearing how miserable the rest of the world is.

Bruce Larson wrote in his book *Living Beyond Our Fears*: Soon after I arrived in [one of my congregations], a couple took me aside to register a complaint. “Since you’ve been here, we seem to laugh a lot in worship. We don’t think that’s appropriate.” I had to level with them. “You may be right, but while I’m here, we’re going to laugh. I think laughter has a legitimate place in worship.” Laughter is one of the hallmarks of emotional health, but there are people who are afraid of even that. There are people throughout the Christian church who are afflicted with a fear of inadequacy. Their fear leads to never attempting anything for the Kingdom of God that sounds a bit risky or challenging.

I believe that if God wants to bless us, let the blessings come, because it may help us put our fears behind us. If God wants to overwhelm us with emotional, financial, relational or spiritual blessings, like an immense catch of fish, who are we to argue with him?

There are at least two major lessons to be learned from Luke 5 and the story of the big catch of fish. FIRST, fish fries are a really good thing for churches to do. Well, no...not *all* churches. FIRST, in the mind of God there is no separation between our spiritual lives and our workaday lives. Jesus wants Simon

to overcome his fear of inadequacy as a fisher of fish AND a fisher of people. SECOND, God is on our side. Throughout the gospels Jesus tells his followers, or anyone around him, "*Don't be afraid.*" God is with us. My sincere hope and prayer is that in this season of Lent when we worship the Lord Jesus we can discover what fears Jesus is releasing us from today.

Jesus tells Simon not to be afraid and gives him an indispensable, urgent mission.

The good news, dear friends, is that we don't have to be afraid either. Amen.