

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Storytellers

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Scripture:

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Transcript:

So good to have all of you here. And those of you in the community center who are hearing the sermon at the same time and those of you online, just thanks for being here. This is a great day, all these baptisms. It's just so, so cool. The scripture is from Luke, Chapter 5, but I'm not going to read it to you. I'm going to show it to you with a clip from the television series, The Chosen, which is different than most Jesus movies in that it's good. It's actually well done. It takes some poetic license, but the scene I'm going to show you is biblically faithful. In it, Simon, whose name Jesus is going to change to Peter, is a fisherman and he has fished all night and caught nothing. This is a big problem. No fish means no money. He's not rich, but he still has to feed his family, so this is a big problem. And then Jesus comes along. Take a look.

Put that down for a catch. A little farther out.

I don't have a quarrel with you, teacher, but we've been doing this all night. Nothing. All right. That's your word. Grab it. Grab the net. Grab it. Let's go. My brother and the baptizer, you are the love of God. Yes?

I am.

Depart from me. I am a sinful man. You don't know who I am, the things I've done.

Don't be afraid, Simon.

I'm sorry we've waited for you for so long. We believe. But my faith, I'm sorry.

Lift up your head fisherman.

What do you want from me? Anything you ask, I will do.

Follow me.

I will.

So the question is why does Simon follow Jesus? I mean, this is the mother of all fish stories, right? The bragging rights on this thing alone are amazing, but he leaves it all rotting on the shore to follow Jesus. Why? Well, I think it's a couple things. For starters, Jesus provides practical help, gives him practical help, solves his practical problem with the fish. Jesus does this. For years, when I was younger, I was had very little money, but Jesus always provided for my needs. I've seen him heal people or I've seen him give people supernatural courage and joy in the midst of hard times. Jesus gives practical help. But the other reason I think Simon follows Jesus is because only Jesus diagnoses our problem correctly, which means only Jesus has the cure. That's why Simon says, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man."

When he encounters the perfection of Jesus, he's drawn to Jesus, but he also recognizes his own sins and his own flaws and the ways that he falls short of Jesus' perfection. We do this even when we get around people. When you get around someone really accomplished, sometimes

maybe you feel a little bit small. Over my life, I've been able to meet a couple of kind of Hollywood superstars as well as one former president. Each time, I was completely tongue-tied. I was like, "Duh, duh, your majesty, duh. What do I call you?" If that's how we feel around people, well then imagine how we feel in the face of God's perfection and holiness. The way our culture says to deal with it is just deny it. Tell yourself you're a good person. Just pretend. Don't look at all you're sins.

Just pretend you're a good person. But that dog don't hunt, because deep down I know, I know I'm not a good person. I know I hurt people. All of us have done things that we don't want anyone else to know about. We would die if they knew about it. We carry this sense of shame, let alone the things we think in our heads. We carry this sense of guilt and shame and the need to hide all of that stuff that we don't want people to see. So we are always haunted by the thought, if they only knew, then they wouldn't love me. But look at how Jesus responds. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people." Jesus gives him nothing but grace and love and forgiveness.

And when you know that you will not be met with condemnation because Jesus died, Jesus who has God in the flesh died to pay the price for your sins and my sins and was raised again, when you know that and that instead you're not going to be met with condemnation, but instead you'll be met with love and grace and forgiveness, you can be real. You can be fully known and fully loved, sins and everything, fully known and fully loved, which sets us free from guilt and shame and the need to posture and pretend that we got it all together. This fall, my wife and I and our oldest daughter were in Paris, and my daughter wanted to take a picture to post on Instagram and it had to be in the right spot and all of that. So we'd look forever to find the perfect street that seemed right and started taking pictures. I don't mean just one quick picture.

No, no, no, no, no, no. She wanted me to press the button over and over and over again. Just keep pressing it while she struck all these different poses. So I just kept pressing and pressing until I got 50 or 60 pictures and then she'd scroll through them. "No, no, no, no, no. No, see the angle on this one is wrong." And then she'd show me another. "It needs to be more like this angle, not this." For the life of me, I could not tell the difference. We must have been there, I kid you not, almost an hour. And because we were there so long, a crowd gathered and people were like, "Is she a model? Why are they taking so long? This must be a famous street. Why else would they take so long to do these pictures?" Because my daughter felt the need to look perfect on Instagram.

However, there's another app called BeReal, which randomly just prompts you at different times each day to post something within two minutes of what you're doing right then in that moment. The idea is to capture your real life, not your carefully cultivated Instagram life. Look at me wearing fabulous clothes, eating fabulous food in fabulous places with fabulous people, and my fabulous friends. Aren't I fabulous? Hashtag blessed.

This app, just be real, show your real life. Jesus' grace and love frees us to live less Instagram and more be real. That freedom is amazing. There's three people over here that know what be real is. So in the community center, you know what BeReal is right? And that freedom is amazing, which leads to the last point. Jesus maximizes who we are. When He tells Simon, "From now on, you a fish for people," he's taking who Simon is, a fisherman, and he's using that for eternal purposes. He's magnifying it for eternal purposes. That solves our purpose problem, this need, do I matter? Do I make a difference? Solves our purpose problem. And it's an interesting choice.

Simon's an interesting choice because he was a train wreck. He was impulsive. He had a filthy mouth. He was violent. At one point, he cut someone's ear off. Okay, normal people do not cut people's ears off. Something is deeply wrong here, but Jesus is going to take all of that energy, all of that passion, and he's going to redirect it and turn it to healing the world. Jesus gives us practical help, frees us from guilt and shame and the need to posture and pretend to have it all together. Jesus maximizes who we are for eternal purposes.

So how do we experience that? How do we experience what Jesus can do? Well, at the beginning of this text, the video didn't show it, but at the beginning of this text, Jesus says to Simon, "Take your boat and put out into deep water, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." This makes no sense. They fished all night and haven't caught anything. Now it's day when it's harder to catch fish, but Simon says, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets." Jesus calls us to put out into deeper water. Part of what that means is he will ask us to do things that don't make sense at time, but if we obey him, there will be an abundant harvest. Because from here on out, Simon, whose name is going to become Peter, Jesus is going to change it to Peter, Simon is going to do amazing things from here on out.

Through Jesus' power, he's going to walk on water. He's going to heal people. He's going to carry God's word all around the world. The things Peter will do, the difference Peter will make because he went into deep water and let down the nets. That brings us to the coolest part of this service today, the coolest part. It's so cool. We have a chance to literally go into deep water, literally into water. We have over a hundred people signed up to be baptized or reaffirm their baptism across our four services ranging in age from three to 89 years old, a hundred people. And in a minute, we're going to sing. When we sing, parents, that's your cue to go get your kids in S150 and bring them back here. Bring them back because this isn't the end of the service.

This is actually the cool part of the service. This is when it's just getting going and you don't want to miss this. You don't want your kids to miss this because for your kids, this is going to be formative. Those of you who have signed up to be baptized, when we start to sing, that's going to be your cue to line up over here to get baptized. Not now because I'm still preaching, okay? That would be distracting. But when we start to sing, that's your cue if you're signed up to line up for baptism. But even if you haven't signed up, even if you haven't signed up and the Holy

Spirit is nudging you right now, you can come be baptized or reaffirm your baptism as well. We are ready for you. We have clothes for you. We have towels for you. We are Presbyterian prepared for the spirit to move. And that is practically a contradiction in terms.

We will ask you a couple of questions. Is Jesus your Savior and your Lord? With his help, will you turn away from sin? Doesn't mean you'll be perfect, but with his help, will you turn away? Will you be part of this church and the church universal? If you can say yes to those questions and you feel God right now nudging you, even if you didn't sign up, you can come forward as well. And then congregation, we play a role in this. So stay here as they get baptized and as we worship, celebrate, cheer, clap, pray for the people being baptized because that's our job as a church. Be inspired by how God is moving. And then next week when we have all the names, including the people who respond today, we will ask you, the congregation, here and in the community center, we will ask you, will you support these people? And you will say...

Yes.

Of course you will, because that's our job as a church. If you have never asked Jesus to be the leader of your life and the forgiver of your sins, if you have never asked Jesus into your life, today is your day. Today is your day. Come forward, receive Jesus and be baptized. Years ago, when I was a college pastor, there was a couple of weeks in a row where every single student I met with had these really difficult intellectual questions that they were answering. How do we know that Jesus is real? Why is there suffering? On and on and on and on. I've got answers for all those questions, but just after weeks of this, it started to put doubts in my mind as well. So one night, I called a friend of mine and we talked news, weather in sports to avoid what I was actually feeling.

But then finally, he said, "Are you okay, Scott?" And I said, "To tell you the truth, no. I'm struggling with some doubts about my faith." And I said, "Do you happen to believe it today?" And he said, "Scott, you caught me on a good day. I do happen to believe it today." And I said, "Then can you remind me why I have believed it all these years?" And he said, "I absolutely can do that. That's easy. Because you know that you are a sinful and only Jesus diagnoses your problem correctly, so only he can fix it, because he loves you more than you can possibly imagine and is making you who he created you to be. Nobody, nobody can do that but Jesus." And in that moment, Jesus became real to me again. I could feel his love. And I said, "Yes, yes, because it's true." I mean, I'm a pretty good person. I'm a pastor, after all. It's got to count for something, right?

But still, I sometimes lash out in anger, in ways that wound people. I lust. I can be indifferent to people in pain. I can have petty jealousies, lack of faith. Oh, I could go on and on and on. We could be here all day listening to my sins, and some of you would like to do that, I'm sure. So much and yet it is this mess that Jesus says he loves enough to die for, to pay the price for my sins that I know need to be paid and be raised again from the dead. He forgives me and he frees me from guilt and shame. He helps me turn away from sin and he has given me a bigger life than I ever would've chosen for myself. Jesus sets us free. So come to Him. Come to Him, if

you are weary. Come to Him, if you are strong. Come to Him when you grieve. Come to Him when you rejoice. Come to Him if you feel like you are too sinful, too dirty, if people only knew.

Come to Him if you have never made him your savior and your leader, because today is your day, Jesus says, come just as you are without one plea, but that my blood was shed for you, and I will make you new. I will give you beauty for ashes. The oil of joy for mourning. I will turn your darkness into day, your sorrow into joy and your sin into my holiness. So come to the altar. The father's arms are open wide calling for you to come home. So Jesus, you and you alone can make us new. So Lord, we pray for the people that are going to be baptized today, the people who signed up, and the people who right now you're nudging down the aisle. We ask that this would be not the end of their journey, but this is the beginning of new chapters with you. And Lord, we thank you that this is your mercy to us, your grace to us. You save us, you forgive us, and then you make us new. We are grateful, grateful people Jesus. In your name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question: What is something that you are looking forward to right now?

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- When have you responded to Jesus like Simon responds to him in verse 8?
- What does it mean to you to follow Jesus at this point in your life? What does it mean for you to be "fishers of people?"

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

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Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.