

#1: Fish? ... What Fish?

Series: Peter's Progress

Luke 5:1-11

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- June 13, 2021

Good morning, Grace! Thank you for joining us. It's a good day to be here. Hey, we're having kind of a crazy summer. Wow! We're having a summer of generosity. Did you know that there are over 2,000 verses in the Bible about giving and only about forty of them actually have to do with the subject of tithing? In other words, ninety-eight percent of the instruction on giving is not about tithing, but rather, on just being grateful and being healthy and just being generous like God is generous.

In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus says, "You've got to choose. You can't serve both God and money." I mean, He could have picked a lot of other villains, but He picks money because it has a gravitational pull on our souls. And so, this summer we're having a summer of generosity, not just because the Bible says to do that, and not just because we're trying to prove to our souls that money doesn't have power over us, but because we're in a very special time. I mentioned last week a thing called a *kairos* moment where it's an opportunity for a decisive moment. We just feel like this is a time for us to be giving in very big ways in our city and around the world.

So, we're having what's called a "**Summer of Giving**" this summer. And what that means is that every gift that's given to the church—just give to the general fund—everything above our already-budgeted amount is going to be given away. We have a team of people looking for strategic opportunities to do that. Last year—I think our fiscal year just ended—we gave away more above budget than we ever have in the history of our church, almost \$250,000. Yeah. We literally are just getting started. We're six weeks into this and we're almost at the same level where we just finished a whole year of giving. So, bring it on! Could you consider participating in our summer of giving? Just give to the general fund and everything above and beyond is going to great places to serve the world.

The Story of Pinocchio

If you'll turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, I want to tell you about a new series that we're getting started. (I might have said Matthew—I mean Luke, Luke chapter 5.) I'll start our teaching time together with a story. Once upon a time ... Once upon a time, a magic block of wood was carved into a puppet. And the puppet could dance. Its strings could cause it to dance. And then it could dance without its strings because it was magic wood, after all. Well, that wasn't enough. Geppetto and Pinocchio both had bigger dreams that someday, some way, maybe that little wooden puppet would be miraculously changed into something real, alive, flesh—a real boy.

I love the story of Pinocchio—the original story, not the ones that all of these other people have come up with—they're way too nice, a little too civilized. The real book of *Pinocchio* was required reading by new teenagers in the Cassidy household. They all had to read it. I would highly recommend reading *Pinocchio*, no matter what your age, but certainly if you have young teenagers, have them read that book. Because Pinocchio, if nothing else, was naïve. And naïve is expensive. It's going to ask of you more than you can afford. The only reason that *Pinocchio* is good is that he runs into just about every kind of temptation and experience that most teens will, and adults too. Read *Pinocchio*. It will be good for you.

The only reason I bring up *Pinocchio* today is because *Pinocchio* is a great metaphor for what it means to be absolutely surrendered and transformed by the power of Jesus Christ. He changes us essentially; our essence is altered. The Spirit's ambition for us—actually, the Father's ambition for us—is by the power of the Spirit that we would become like Christ in all of life. When you look at it that way, it's like the goal to become a real boy, a real girl. If you look ahead five years from now and look at your life and what it might be, think about where you are now and what would need to change if you are so angry or self-centered or petty or afraid. What would be the wood that would have to be cut off and cut away for you to become flesh, to become like Christ? Because you can't be passive about change. You can't say, *Well, that's just the way I am*, or, *If I were in a different set of circumstances, then I'd be a different kind of person*. Because real change in the Bible is about how the Spirit of God in any situation, in any human soul, invades that soul as long as their heart is humble and able to receive.

Introduction to Peter

The best Pinocchio story in the Bible, I think, is the story of Peter. He's a New Testament character, he's in all four gospels, and it seems like everyone can relate to Peter, male, female, old and young, educated and not so much, the timid, the brave. And I think we like Peter and so many people can relate to him because we usually say something like, "Look at the way this man messes things up! I can relate to that."

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

When strangers meet Peter, look what they say about him in Acts chapter 4: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." Ordinary—that's me. Astonishing—that's Jesus. They had spent time with Jesus and that's where the magic happens.

The story of Peter is God's grace on top of the decisions that Peter chooses to make. So, I'd like us to spend four weeks, a quick little fun summer series in a biographical look at the life of Peter. We're going to look at him to see his choices and maybe the motives and the points of choice, why he made these choices, that we might learn how to change; that we might learn to become what God wants us to be.

Simon is a full character. As a matter of fact, he's the only full character that's in all four gospels, fully formed. He's mentioned over two hundred times. Now, in contrast, John is mentioned about thirty-one times in the gospels. So, there's purpose in this. Peter is the leader of the twelve. It will often say, "Peter and those other men ..." His name is always first in a list whenever he's mentioned. He's the first one to be called by Jesus by name. He's the first person in the gospels that will admit that he's a sinner. We're going to see that in today's story. There is no one that is more severely rebuked than Peter. There are seven miracles that are performed for Peter to learn from: "Peter, watch this."

In other words, besides Jesus himself, Peter is the co-star. He is the central character in all four gospels. Let's learn from him. Let's learn not to just learn about Peter; let's learn about ourselves so that we can learn about Jesus and how to become like Christ in all of life.

Peter the Fisherman

All right. Here's what you need to know about Peter. Peter is a fisherman. And I mean, he is a fisherman. He doesn't fish; he and his brother Andrew are in a partnership and that partnership is with another boat with James and John. They're brothers as well. But they grew up fishing and fishing is their identity. It's like being a surfer, like "Dude, it's about the waves." Everything else is about paying bills so they can get to the waves, dude. And that's the nature of living on the water in a lot of ways. It's not easy. It's the smell of the sea. There are easier ways to make a living. But there's something about it. Every day's a gamble. Instead of rolling the dice you put out the nets and you see what happens. That's what kind of man he is.

And when we look at this story we're going to see how Jesus Christ comes after Peter the fisherman. Here's how the first story ends. Did I say that right? This is the ending of the first story of Peter. If you'll just envision this, if you would: you're flying up from the south, you look at the Sea of Galilee. It's a beautiful lake. It's not a sea, it's a lake surrounded by a mountain range. And there at the top northern part of the Sea of Galilee is where Peter lives. And on a beach right there we can see two—they look shipwrecked, but—waterlogged boats. And they're surrounded by a crowd of people. And the crowd of people is kind of in a fury. They're looking for baskets to pick up because these two boats are awash in fish. And people are getting baskets and grabbing the fish and taking them off. Women are pulling up their skirts and filling them up as much as they can with the fish. It's not looting. No one is stealing anything. There are too many fish and if someone doesn't take them home they're just going to die and rot.

But the strangest part of this scene when you come upon it is that the four men, the owners of the two boats, are gone. They left everything. They're not even to be seen in this. This is the biggest catch in the history of this town, the greatest fishing story ever—you know fishermen--and they're not even there. I mean, it would be like if you imagine a gold miner just leaving his pickaxe right in the middle of a two-foot gold vein. That's what's happening. It's a very strange thing that's going on here. That's how it ends.

This is the lesson. Peter and his friends left everything they ever had dreamt of, everything they had ever wanted, because now it wasn't enough. They want to follow Jesus.

Whatever you want, it's not enough, not compared to following Jesus. That's what this story is about.

Luke 5:1-3

One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee with the people 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.

Let's take it from the top. Chapter 5, verse 1: "One day as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats. They were left there by fishermen who were washing their nets. And he got into one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon (or Peter), and He asked him to let Him out a little way from the shore. And then Jesus sat down and taught the people from the boat."

So, this is just another day in the life of Peter. This is not the first time he's seen Jesus or seen Him teach. He's just going to do what he does a lot of times, and that's sit down and fix his net and let Jesus use his boat for a pulpit. I mean, he's just trying to get something done while listening to this sermon. Like right now, people at home are cleaning their house while they're listening to this sermon. It's just one of those things. I can relate.

And you think, *What did Jesus preach on to change Peter's life?* It doesn't matter. What do you mean, it doesn't matter? This is the best preacher of all time. It's not even mentioned in the passage. That's not what the story's about. This isn't the first sermon that Peter has heard from Jesus. I mean, the carpenter-turned-pastor met his brother Andrew maybe months before when Andrew was following John the Baptist. So, He worked His way to this region and he'd heard Him preach. So, it's just like another day where he's going to listen to a good sermon and he's going to fix up his nets.

But this particular morning, Andrew and Peter and James and John were clenching their teeth. It was a bad night on the lake. They had nothing to show for it—all night, not a single fish.

Don't ask them. This is how fishermen are. Don't ask them, "How'd it go? What'd you catch?" Here's how fishermen work—if it was a great catch, they're going to tell you. They love to crow about the big catches, and they're not so good at failure. They're not very good losers.

So, they had a plan. *We're going to clean the nets, we're going to listen to the end of this sermon, and then we're going to go get a nap.* That's the plan. Work the plan.

Luke 5:4-5

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."

And then ... "When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and let your nets go for a big catch.' And Simon said, 'Uh, master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.'"

When Jesus asked to borrow Jesus' boat for a pulpit, not a word from Peter. When Jesus tells Peter what to do with his boat for fishing, it's like, *Stay in your lane. Stay in your lane, preacher man.* So, there's this pause, a little bit of pushback. And then he does this. "But because you say so, I'll let down the nets." And that's when it happened. I'll bet people from the shore could see it happening out there in the Sea of Galilee. I bet like it looked like the water was boiling, because then the fish just started coming in the nets. I bet it startled some, probably frightened others. People were scared.

Luke 5:6-7

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.

Here's what took place in verses 6 and 7: "And when they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full they began to sink."

Luke 5:8-10

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.

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

Why did Peter fall down? It was too much. It was over his capacity.

Our senses perceive no extreme. Too much sound deafens us; too much light dazzles us; too much truth is paralyzing; too much pleasure disagrees with us; too much grace ... irritates us; we wish to have the wherewithal to overpay our debts.

---Blaise Pascal

Blaise Pascal wrote this about the nature of man's soul. He said, "Our senses perceive no extremes. Too much sound deafens us; too much light dazzles us; too much truth paralyzes us; too much pleasure disagrees with us; too much grace ... irritates us.

"Too much grace irritates us ... we wish we had the wherewithal to overpay our debts." He had a dream. What would happen if you had a dream like Peter? If you had a dream and the dream came true and it just kept coming true? Your soul doesn't know what to do with that. It's humiliated. It can become agitated by it.

Peter in Contrast to Others

This whole story and the nature of the storytelling here is that Peter is in contrast to almost anything else that's going on. I mean, the crowds come to Jesus. Jesus actually comes to Peter. He didn't go to Jesus—Jesus came to him. The crowds are pushing their way to get

towards Jesus; Peter here is saying, “Jesus, you get away from me.” The begging and bartering going on—Peter didn’t beg for what he wanted; he wanted a bunch of fish. Now he’s begging for the thing he doesn’t want: “Please get away from me; leave me, Jesus.” Peter’s soul can manage failure. He was okay with no fish and empty nets: but then when success came, he was undone. When complete success came it was the thread that pulled, and he didn’t know how to contain himself. Nothing can prepare the human soul for Yahweh’s frightening generosity. Nothing can prepare the human soul for Yahweh’s frightening grace.

And so, Jesus is communicating to Peter in Peter’s miracle language: fish. You want to speak to the Magi? Give them a miraculous star. You want to speak to a fisherman? Let him wait and dream and hope and think about, even pray, about a big catch, and then give him something, more than he could ever ask or imagine.

Jesus Responds

Luke 5:8, 10-11

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.

Peter realizes that Jesus is not just a carpenter-turned-preacher. He’s good, but He’s better than that. And He’s not just like an Elijah that they’ve been waiting for. At this point, he realizes that He’s dealing with the holiness of God. And that’s why he says this in verse 8. “And Simon saw this and he fell at Jesus’ feet and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord, I’m a sinful man.’ And then Jesus says to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid. From now on you will catch men.’ So, they pulled up their boats on shore and left everything and followed Him.”

Look at the exchange here. Peter says, “I’m a sinful man. Get away from me. Leave... just leave so I can live.” *Send me into the pigs, right? I can’t be in your presence. I know what’s happening here. I know who you are now. Please leave.*

And Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid, sinner.” He doesn’t take that away from Peter. “Don’t be afraid, sinner. The Father has not sent me to the world to condemn the world. He’s sent me to the world to save sinners” ... *and make puppets into real boys and real girls. I’ve come to do the extraordinary. I’ve come to make you real. Do not be afraid.*

That’s what happens whenever Jesus reveals Himself to mortals. We don’t know what to do. If there’s just a slight crack in the drapes and we see a little bit of what Jesus is really like, what God is really like, the first things we’re going to hear from God in His mercy are, “Don’t be afraid.”

In Peter’s life it happens to him. Jesus is doing this to him on a few occasions. Jesus calms the sea and he says to Peter and the others, “Don’t be afraid.” Later on, Jesus is going to walk on water and the men will be rattled for who Jesus really is, and He’ll say, “Don’t be afraid.” Peter, James, and John are going to see the transfigured Jesus Christ, what He may look like in the next life. And He says to them, “Don’t be afraid.” When Jesus is resurrected from the dead, He meets Peter and He says, “Don’t be afraid.” When the veil is lifted even slightly, terror ensues. It is the nature of the holiness of God for us to be very afraid. “Don’t be afraid—fear me,” says Yahweh.

I mean, there’s an application in that alone. Is your relationship with God such that when you spend time in the Bible, reading what He says, in your experience living for Him, has He revealed Himself at a depth where you got to see enough to be afraid, terrorized, when you feel the Spirit of God say, “Don’t be afraid.” *I’m a sinner—get out!* “Don’t be afraid.”

It’s the part of the life of every saint, and it’s not one-time event. It’s as we grow that we see more of ourselves and we see more of who Jesus is and we become newly afraid again-- which is also a consequence here. This is the story of the life of Peter. He’s got a three-year journey ahead. Is it safe to follow Jesus? Who said anything about safe! Come and see and you’ll be afraid, and in that fear, you’ll know more about who Christ is and the power of His Spirit in your life, and then you’ll break through that fear barrier. And when you do, you’ll be introduced to a greater fear that you wouldn’t even face before. And then you’ll be able to break through, and you’re growing in Christ, into another fear. The nature of the Christian life is the nature of

being discipled in Christ. In this three-year journey for Peter, it's going to be fear and overcoming fear, to a new fear, and overcoming fear. That's what it is. The transition from being a puppet to being real boy or a real girl—yeah, that's scary. And Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit living in us—that's the only way it happens.

Three Attributes of Peter that We Need to Have

What I'd like to do now is look at three attributes that Peter has that we need to have; three things that we need to practice regularly. Every day we need to do this and make sure we check these to make sure our souls are well. This is how the Spirit of God lives alive, how He speaks clearly, how He encourages us—these three attributes.

1. Peter's Willingness to Cast Out the Nets

Luke 5:5

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.”

The first one that I noticed is Peter's humble willingness to cast out the nets. Verse 5—I'll read it again—“Peter answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.’” Right there at the end of that sentence, before the next one, that place is where eternity stops dead. That's the infinite power of the present, right there. It's not about the past, the future we can't do anything about, either; it's the present. This is the moment where the fate of Peter is paused. Because in this moment, there's a simple question and there's a simple answer. Jesus says, “Cast the nets out a little deeper out there,” and Peter can say, “You know what? No.” Maybe he'll be polite. *Look, I'm really tired. You know what, I'd love to, but that lake is fished out.* That's it. That's all. And then Peter becomes just another forgotten piece of dust in the wind.

But he doesn't. He says, “But because You say so, I will let the nets down.” *But because You say so ...* that tiny expression of obedience, that little bitty act of submission—I'm sorry—

there is no such thing as a tiny act of submission. There is no such thing as small obedience. Because it ripples into eternity and into the human soul. This is like the definition of obedience. This is what obedience is. He's doing it solely and entirely because the Lord said so. That's it. Peter is a fisherman. He grew up fishing with his father. This is his career. This is his profession. Going back out and casting deeper goes against all of his experience and his most recent experience, by the way, all of his common sense, his custom, his culture—everything. So, he goes against that. By the way, it's not obedience if you have to understand it to obey. That's not obedience. To have a biblical value, it's not like the biblical value owns you if you'd like to hold it anyway and it's easy to hold. Obedience is not doing something because you'd do it anyway. That's not what obedience is. This is humble obedience. He doesn't understand. And if you wait to understand before you obey, you're never going to have a boat filled with fish. That's how you get a boat overflowing with fish, by doing what God says because God says so.

We call Jesus the Lord. Why? Because He is the Lord over us. And He tells us what is right and real and true. And we just say okay. We say He's a king because kings rule. The King rules my soul.

Why does he do it? Because God said so. Let's practice saying that. Why do it? Everybody? Because God says so. Boom. That's what obedience is.

Now listen, if you regularly submit to Him and you're humble and sometimes you hear a still, small voice or have an impression, that's not like the same thing, but it's a great place to start. Just do it. Don't argue. Just do it. Just obey. Because there is no little act of obedience. It's eternal. It's a daily decision. This isn't the only time Peter had to do this.

2. Peter's Courageous Self-Awareness

The second trait after his humble submission is Peter's courageous self-awareness. He says, "I'm a sinner." And that's true. There's no debate, even by Jesus. And God can use Peter because Peter understands that God doesn't need him. And when some people wake up in the morning and think, *God, do you know who I am? And you're lucky to have me and I've done this ...* That's not what Peter has. Peter understands. And what he brings to the relationship with Jesus Christ is sin. And Yahweh God brings everything else.

3. Peter's Decision to Leave Everything to Follow Jesus

So, it's his definition of obedience that we should look at. It's his humble understanding of his sinfulness. And then last is that Peter leaves everything to follow Jesus. Peter the fisherman is no more. There's no Peter the fisherman. And by that, I mean that that was Peter's identity. Identity is how you define yourself. And what Jesus does is, when you let Him define you and decide not to be defined by your generational career and your value and how other people value you, God says, *I can take that. And if you leave that right over here, I'll give you something more.*

Jesus Christ saves us from the degrading necessity of being the child of our time. We don't have to be the product of whatever time this is. We can be something original and different.

---G. K. Chesterton

G. K. Chesterton says, "Jesus Christ saves us from the degrading necessity of being a child of our time like everyone else." We don't have to be a product of whatever time it is. We can be something original, something different. When Jesus redefines us, when He re-identifies us, we go from temporal to eternal. We go from wood to spirit. You don't have to be a doctor or a mother or a mechanic. You are a prince and a princess that happens to practice medicine or work on cars. This whole identity change—Peter is a fisherman, a son of a fisherman, always has been a fisherman, and now, with the catch of his life, the story of all stories that fishermen will be telling for generations---he says, *Fish? All those fish? What fish?* Because they were just fish. They were just fish.

So, he loses his identity. They leave everything, but they leave their lives. And the second thing is that they define what it means to be all in. They leave everything. They don't hedge their bets. It says they left their boats and their nets. And that's what it means. It means some times, most of the time—let's just say all of the time—you can't have it both ways. You can have salvation and lordship, and this can be tagging along, but you can't hedge your bet and hold onto both.

Peter could have said, *Okay, I'll follow you, but I'm going to hold onto these nets. I'll just carry them around with me. I've got this. It won't be hard.*

Okay. We're doing the Sermon on the Mount next week.

On the top of the mountain? These things are getting really heavy here.

Leave them behind, Peter.

Yeah, the nature of following is leaving it all behind. When you're following Jesus Christ, you're supposed to look a little bit crazy. You're supposed to look like you burned the bridges behind you, like there's no going back.

What do you call a fisherman—this is more like a punch line—what do you call a fisherman that doesn't have a boat or any nets? A disciple of Jesus Christ. And even if he stayed and was still fishing, he wouldn't own them. They wouldn't own him. That would just be a thing he did.

Application

So, here's how to look at this. Are you still defining yourself by the way you were, whether it was good or bad, whether you were successful or a failure? Because Jesus is asking you to leave that identity. Are you hedging your bet? Are you going almost all in, which is not all in? Are you withholding something from God? I'll bet if you are, it's because you don't trust Him. You don't think He's good. Let Him crack that curtain, let Him show you under the veil the terror of His generosity.

Here's what Peter says that we need to know and learn. As Americans, we invented pragmatism. Following Jesus doesn't work any other way. It can't work. This is what obedience and knowledge of our sinfulness and going all in looks like. The reason it's successful is because it's the only way it can work. Jesus is the only one—Yahweh God defines what is right. He defines what is right, not the media, not our friends. He decides what is real, not the government. He decides what is true, not popularity. He's the King. So, He rules us. He's not an advisor. He's the Lord. He's not our consultant.

Jesus doesn't play second chair. He doesn't play second fiddle, because He can't even read the notes. He doesn't even know how. He leads, or you get left. Those are the choices. He leads, or you get left. Peter knew that. And Peter left everything. He left nothing. He followed Christ.

Here's what we learn from this story. God loves to work with sinners, and we haven't even begun to see the sinner in Peter. But He loves to work with sinners who decide every day what it means to obey, what it means to know yourself to be a sinner, and what it means to go all in. And with that, He can make a toy into a saint. Let Him have a shot, maybe in a new way, starting today.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, this moment, this time, I'd ask that this story would speak to us. Peter's so relatable. Let's let this relate to us, maybe the way he responds, or the way we don't respond like him. But Lord, let this be our example of obedience. Sometimes we just want to hold onto popularity. That's our net. And You say you can't choose both. Follow popularity or follow Jesus.

Lord, I'd ask that You would call out to us, anything that we're trying to hold onto to hedge our bet, in an expression of pride that keeps us from saying that we are sinful and sinners, and anything that keeps us from being all that You wanted us to be—real life in Your glory, so that we might become all that You inspire us to be, that we might experience Your holiness, even the terror of Your holiness, so that we might bring joy to You. We've got the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so that we might hear Your voice say, "Don't be afraid. I'll see you soon."

Lord, I'd ask that You would cause us to be courageously pursuing You, at whatever costs. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.