



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 7, 2016

"We Have Worked All Night But Caught Nothing"
(ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Luke 5:1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,

Luke 5:2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

Luke 5:3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

Luke 5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Luke 5:6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

Luke 5:7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

Luke 5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Luke 5:9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;

Luke 5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

Luke 5:11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Many of us here think we're experts in something. A student may say, "I'm an expert in studying." A single man or woman may say, "I'm an expert in dating." A parent may say, "I'm an expert in raising kids." Someone with a job may say, "I know how to best do my job. I've been doing it for years, so I'm an expert in it."

In today's Bible passage we'll see that those who encountered Jesus discovered they didn't know their business as well as they thought they did.

We're on our sermon series called Encounters with Jesus. And today's passage is about Simon Peter's encounter with Jesus. Simon, at this point of the story, was still a fisherman but would later become a leader of Jesus' disciples known just as Peter.

The story in the passage starts off pretty normal but then builds and builds into quite an extraordinary story. Jesus comes to the shore of a lake and sees fishermen

washing their nets. They had been out all night fishing but came up empty.

Jesus asks Simon if he and his crew would let Him to use his boat as a floating platform for speaking to a crowd. Simon says, "Yes!" And Jesus says, "Put out into shallow water." And Simon says, "Throw the anchor into the water.

After playing the middle eastern game of Simon says, Jesus sits down and speaks to the crowd. This apparent amphitheater near the shore makes Jesus higher and better seen by the crowd.

When He finishes teaching, Jesus says to Simon, "Hey, all *pau* now, so take the boat out into deep water and let's catch some fish."

Simon replies, "We catch fish at night, not during the day. Nighttime is when the fish are more active and at the surface feeding. Daytime due to the heat they go deeper. Maybe you didn't know that Jesus.

"And we have worked all night long ... all night long.... (sounds like a Lionel Ritchie song) ... and we nevah catch even a little *humuhumu-nukunukuapua'a*. Not even a *manini manini*. No more nutting! And now you're telling me to move out into the deep and cast our nets where no *ama'ama* gone come swimming to me? And did you notice, Jesus, that when you first saw us we were already washing our nets? That meant we were done.

It also means that if we throw the nets back into the sea, we will need to wash them again after not catching nutting!”

But somehow Jesus was able to persuade Peter to put out into the deep. And lo and behold, when they lowered their nets into the lake, they caught a ton of fish! So many of them, in fact, that the nets were breaking. Peter had to call his partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee, in the other boats to help. (Pop quiz: Who was the father of the sons of Zebedee? That’s right—Zebedee. You’re sharp!)

James and John came and they filled both boats with so many fish that their boats got lower and lower till they began to sink. Simon, seeing the bounty of fish, and realizing he’s going to get great prices of sashimi in Galilee (has a nice ring to it), he falls at Jesus feet and said, “Lord, I am a sinful man for doubting You.”

Very cool story. Moral of the story? There are times when we think we are the expert, but Jesus is.

Who is the expert in your life? Do you think it is you? Who should be the expert in your life?

Let’s look at the sermon title: “We have worked all night long but caught nothing.” It will be really sad if we have studied and worked all of our lives up to this point but have caught nothing. And that happens if we put all of our hopes, money, time, and dreams in the wrong things.

But here is the crazy thing that happens. Simon, who will later be called Peter in the Gospels, discovers that being with Jesus enriches him greatly. He is now super wealthy. He has caught a lot of fish. He might even become famous for this catch. He is the king of *Kozo Sushi* with all that

fish. He’s got riches and fame.

But then something crazy happens. Simon Peter discovers that with Jesus he is super rich, and that Jesus is more expert than he. But then, Jesus asks him to leave it all behind. Most of us like the first part—Jesus makes me healthy and wealthy. But we skip the last part where he says the wealth is worth leaving.

To follow up on Ron’s sermon last week, it’s like Jesus gives you the ticket to win the Powerball, and you shout, “I just won more than a billion dollars. Thank you Jesus!” And then Jesus says, leave it all behind. And you say, as in *Star Trek*, “Are you out of your Vulcan mind?”

So the shock to our system is that Jesus is far better at doing what you are doing. And then the after shock is, all those things that you thought were important, pale in comparison to a friendship with Him.

But here is where my talk takes a turn. Hang in there for it will come out okay in the end. You know how I talk about how we need to remove the false gods in our lives. One of those false gods is a life with no pain or sacrifice.

I just read an article by Mark Manson entitled *You probably know to ask yourself, ‘What do I want?’ Here’s a way better question.*

He said everyone wants to live a carefree, happy easy life to fall in love and have amazing sex and relationships, to look perfect and make money and be popular and be well respected and admired – to the point that people part like the Red Sea when you walk into a room. Everyone would like that – it’s easy to like that.

He writes, “If I ask you, ‘what do you want out of life?’ and you say something like, ‘I want to be happy and have a great family and a job I

like,’ it’s so ubiquitous [so common] that it doesn’t even mean anything.

“A more interesting question, a question that perhaps you’ve never considered before, is, “What pain do you want in your life? What are you willing to struggle for? Because that seems to be a greater determinant of how our lives turn out.”

Mark Manson wrote about how single people want an awesome relationship. But if they are not willing to go through the pain and psychodrama and the hurt feelings to get there, they will settle for something far less.

He says that happiness requires struggle. You can only hold off handling the negative for so long. People want an amazing physique but you know the phrase – no pain, no gain. If you don’t choose to go to a gym regularly, and calibrate and calculate your food portions, then you are not going to have a better-looking body.

He says it is really bad advice when you hear, “You’ve just got to want it enough!” Just wanting something doesn’t help if you are NOT choosing to have pain.

So try asking this question at the next party you go to. Ask, “What are you willing to struggle or be inconvenienced for,” and they might look strangely at you. But it’s a question that can change your life.

Mark Manson talked about how for his teen years and young adulthood he wanted to be a rock star. He wanted people to scream when he took the stage and be in awe of his awesome guitar playing. He would be the Lord of the Guitar Licks. But then he realized he wasn’t willing to choose to suffer to practice and rehearse to get there.

He was more in love with the result – the image of him on stage with people cheering and he rocking out than the painful process of getting there. It's not that he failed. It's that he hardly tried at all because practice is drudgery and boredom to the one who chooses not to suffer.

Now it makes sense when Jesus says, "He called the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If you want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."(Mark 8:34)

To follow Jesus means you throw down your net, you give up fame, you don't need riches or love money and you have a heart to serve others in the city. If you have ever recoiled in horror on this verse as to why should I want to pick up a cross, now you understand it more deeply. It's not about flagellating yourself. It's talk about the pain in anything worth doing.

This is an encounter with Jesus where He's basically asking you, "Would you choose to follow Me? The way of the cross is a choice to suffer, to suffer for good, to suffer for a mighty cause. Would you throw down your nets to follow Me?"

Maybe that's a question I should ask in our new members class – Are you joining the church because you're willing to suffer or sacrifice to make this church one that honors Christ? Or are you joining just to be served or entertained?

The question is this: For what in life are you willing to suffer? But you may be saying, "Dan this is a downer message. You are not Debbie Downer but Danny Downer. You saying I have to suffer to follow Jesus."

No, I am not really taking about just pain. I am talking about LOVE. While it is possible to suffer and

not love, it is not possible to love and not suffer. Let me say it again. While it is possible to suffer and not love, it is not possible to love and not suffer.

What does it really mean to love someone or love God? To love someone takes you outside of yourself. It's not all about you. And in a strange way, love makes you more concerned about someone else's well being even more than your own.

When you love someone, it is a strange form of suffering. How is that? You become completely vulnerable and you place yourself in a place where you could be compromised or hurt as a result of your complete commitment to that person.

This is true in a friendship, or in a loving business relationship, or in a parenting relationship or in a marriage. True love means you could get ruined financially, emotionally, and in some ways physically as you give everything to sustain the life of someone else. Now I am not talking about being a victim of abuse. I am talking about the healthy kind of love where you are willing to sacrifice for your child, a friend, a spouse in a way that you want the best for them.

This is all about Christian love. It is in the suffering itself that shows us how precious, valuable true love is. But the value is not the gift itself but the giver. It's a matter of perspective.

Let me explain. If I gave you a \$10,000 Mont Blanc pen or a \$10,000 bottle of champagne you might think that is so cool! Yet, that kind of gift might not mean much to a billionaire. Big deal. So the receiver might help define gratitude and the extent of love, but the true context of love is what did it cost the GIVER personally?

Same thing today, if you brought a \$40 plate of Kozo sushi to a Super Bowl party, people might think

that's nice but not that big a deal. But what if you were a POW, as we have some here in our church who though starving shared his food with another? OR what if you were a fireman running into a burning building to save a child, or a marine who ran into an open field to save a wounded comrade, as one of our church family has, now we see things in a different way.

Sacrifice or suffering may not mean much, but personal suffering of the giver as a consequence of sacrificial love is absolutely priceless beyond measure. Now we are better understanding Jesus who says, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*"

And even more importantly what it means to throw down our nets to pick up a cross and follow Him. It's the way of sacrificial love. Jesus knew that sacrificial love, suffering love is the greatest gift of all.

Hence, if you are choosing to throw down your nets to follow Jesus, then it will be a life of love. But that means it will be a life of suffering for it is impossible to love without suffering.

One of the reasons we care for children in poverty is because our hearts ache as God's heart aches for children who are poor and abused. A true follower of Christ will suffer for them in time or money. Our hearts should ache for the immigrants who can't get to a free country.

Now it makes sense when I say, I believe as Christians we live a life of pain. And second, we should be CHOOSING to live a life of pain. Because we are choosing to love as Christ loves. I hope that when our heads hit our pillows at night, we'll feel that all the pain and struggle we've gone through for following Jesus was worth it. For I have done what God wanted me to do.

And I have caught the fish that He wanted me to catch.

We might have a Hallmark-card or Norman-Rockwell-painting notion that a life with Jesus will always be rosy. It will be a life sitting on a cold night near a fire sipping a beverage with bread and cheese, or with popcorn and *kakimochi* or, better yet, freshly cut sashimi and soy sauce and French's mustard. Or we think a life with Jesus is sitting near a swimming pool on a hot summer day eating Bubbies mochi ice cream or on a swing beneath a spreading chestnut tree overlooking rolling green hills while I sip my sweet plantation iced tea, and as my dog Rover comes bounding up to me and licks me.

And suddenly reality crashes. Wait a minute, I don't have a dog named Rover, I have dogs named Max and Molly, and I don't have a swimming pool, and I don't have a fireplace with which to eat *kakimochi* or freshly cut sashimi!

Here's reality – the biblical view of a walk with God is this: When we really love Jesus, we don't mind suffering for Him or for others in His name. And until we understand that we will always complain and whine when pain hits us and the prayer on our lips will be: "Why is this happening to me? Why me? I am following God!" Don't cling to a false view of a pain-free life with God.

I have friends in China where Bible study meetings and worship means taking a risk. They can be arrested at any time for worshiping God because they are breaking the law, which says there can be no unregistered churches and no evangelism outside of the registered church campuses.

In China you can worship God in huge legal churches that serve like 4000 people. But there are many

Christians there who don't want to have to worship at registered churches controlled by a Communist government. So they go underground. They meet in house churches.

Gary Toh's friend went to China and met a group of pastors from underground churches. Someone asked how many of them were imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution, and all of the hands went up! They were asked, "For how many years?" For one year, 5 years, 10 years? Hands kept going up.

Pam and I just heard that an acquaintance of ours just got arrested in Hangzhou. He's a pastor of a mega church because he objected that the government was tearing down the cross off of his church. In jail he will suffer, but you don't mind suffering for someone you love and that is Jesus.

Whether in China or in Africa or in the Philippines, people walk for hours in the hot sun or in the snow to get to a worship service. Why? Because they love Jesus. To follow Christ for them is a lot harder than those who might complain going to a church because it's 15 minutes farther and a drive through the Pali, through one of the island's most beautiful sceneries, and in an air-conditioned car. That might be a sacrifice but to our developing world fellow Christians in the majority part of the world, they won't understand how that is a sacrifice for Americans.

Why was Simon Peter, and James and John willing to throw down their nets to follow Jesus? Everything changed then they saw in this man a person willing to suffer for everyone, as He eventually did on a cross. God knew that the only way that He could truly express His love and enter into a real authentic loving relationship with us was to give us the gift that really cost the Giver personally.

You who may be skeptical about the Christian faith today may think it is silly that God would choose to come to this earth and allow mere mortals to torture and execute Him, but everything changes when you realize He did it to show you how much He loves you for He did it to take a bullet for us.

When Jesus says leave the big catch and all that fish and follow me He is asking, "Do you want ME or the STUFF that I provide you? Do you love me, my heart, my character or just my promises of help?"

While we may not like suffering for the Lord, suffering as a result of love makes it worth it beyond measure. This is why Jesus says, to Simon Peter and James and John, don't just get caught up in being just a fisherman, be a fisher of men and women and children, meaning follow Me and love them and bring them to Me that they might know my love and how fulfilling it is because I am God who's willing to suffer for you to show you My undying love."

In His going to the cross, Jesus took on all of our human condition as sinful and selfish and self-centered as we are and by dying on the cross He was the living sacrifice that would totally cleanse us so that we could then live in heaven and be in a place of joy for eternity. And He did it to show us that the way we live now in this world could be a meaningful life, not an empty one.

This is why the sacrament of communion is so important. It is a scared ceremony reminding us of God's love. It reminds us that Jesus was crucified on a cross for our sake. (Pastor Dan led the congregation to Communion service.)