SM012 – A New Kind of Fisherman

It was early in the morning. Jesus had gone to a quiet, secluded place to pray and think about the mission before him. Peter, Andrew, and a few other disciples had searched for him and found him. With great excitement they said, "Master, many people in the village are looking for you. They want to hear you teach," but Jesus said

"I know. But we must go to other places to preach the kingdom and to heal those who are sick."

"Yes, Master," Peter said. "I know we must go to other places, but we did not expect it to be so soon. Our father has been struggling with his fishing business. And so has the family of Zebedee. James and John have said their family has greatly missed their work on the lake. We have all spent so much time away. Our fathers have hired workers, but they have not had big enough catches. Could we not stay for a bit longer that we may help our families?"

Jesus smiled and said, "I do care for your families. Tonight, you may fish, and we will see what will happen tomorrow."

And so Peter and Andrew, and James and John went back to their families and prepared to fish during the night. Fishing was usually done during the night when the fish would be closer to the surface of the water. During the heat of the day, they would plumb deeper into the coolness of the lake. Night was the time for the big catch. But even then the work was hard and the life of a fisherman in Galilee to provide for his family was precarious.

Royal officials and large landowners would contract with fishermen for a certain amount of fish to be delivered at a specified time. The fishermen would be paid in coinage or in processed fish, but the system was set up to favor royalty or landowners and the fishermen would get little in return for their hard work. But jobs were scarce and fish were abundant. It was the only choice for many who lived in that region of the world.

All night long, the men threw their nets into the lake, and all night long they drew them into their boats, empty. Hour after hour passed, and then the sun began to rise and soon the oppressive heat of the day would be upon them. It was time to row to shore, dry their nets and mend them. What would they tell Jesus? Would he give them another night to try again?

The disciples removed their nets from the boat and lay them in the sun to dry, and then they began to clean and repair any places that had been torn by the night's work.

The disciples were gloomy. They were quiet and they were tired. They had worked all night and caught nothing. Then, they heard and saw in the distance a crowd. Jesus was in front of the crowd, and he was talking and laughing with many. He seemed to have gotten a good night's sleep. Others seemed to be enjoying their time with Jesus. But the disciples were tired, hungry, and without fish for their family. They continued working on their nets when Jesus approached and said,

"How was your night, Peter? How was your fishing John?"

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With a tinge of grumpiness in his voice Peter blurted, "I think you can see Master how it was. We have nothing to show for our work. What will our families say? What will they do?"

Jesus seemed to ignore his comments. "Peter, I have decided, before I go to other villages, to teach the people of Capernaum one more time. Would you mind? May I use your boat? Would you row out some distance and from there I will speak to the people who are assembled here on the beach."

Peter sighed a deep sigh. He was really tired but he said, "Yes, master, if you wish. You may use my boat to teach. It doesn't seem to be any good for fishing anymore," and Peter and Andrew rowed out a short distance, Jesus sat in the boat, and began to address the crowds.

He spoke of many things, but in all of his teaching, in all of the Scriptures he cited, he always spoke of the hope of the people, the hope of the kingdom of God. The people's hearts were filled as Jesus spoke, a contrast to the boat of empty fish. Peter knew that what Jesus was doing was important. He knew that Jesus was touching the hearts of the people deeply. But he also knew that bellies needed to be filled, including those of his family.

Finally, Jesus finished. They rowed to the beach. Jesus dismissed everyone. Then he turned to Peter and said, "I want to go out to the lake with you and Andrew." Jesus turned to James and John and said, "I want you also to come in your boat. And, I want you to bring your nets."

"Bring our nets? Master, we have worked hard all night and caught nothing. Look, you are from Nazareth, not the lake, but still you should know that the best catches are during the night, not the day. It is hot now. The fish are heading to the bottom of the lake, if they are not there now. There is no catch to be had now. Besides we have already dried and mended our nets."

But Peter could see by the look in Jesus' eye that he must obey. And so he said, "Alright, we will go, if you insist. Andrew, James, John – gather the nets into the boats. We're going fishing again."

And so the disciples gathered their nets into the boats, they rowed to the deep part of the lake, the very place where they had fished during the night, and Jesus said, "This should be about right, Peter. Let down your nets." Then he called to James and John, "Men, let down your nets." And when they did, it was only a moment before they felt a tugging on the cords that were in their hands. They held tightly to the nets, they strained their muscles, and the fatigue from the hard work and disappointment of the night's labor vanished as their nets filled with large, fat, fish – more than they had ever seen before.

Their nets began to break and Peter called out, "James, John, quickly come and help us," and the other two disciples came and helped to haul in the abundance of the catch for Peter and Andrew. Then, their nets began to fill and break and Peter and Andrew had to help them. "Our nets are breaking. I have never seen anything like this. With care and great effort, they hauled the fish in and still more came until finally Peter said, "Andrew, I … I think our boat is sinking under the weight of the fish. Jesus help us." But Jesus just laughed and said, "I think it's time to head toward the shore. We won't sink. Let's go back." And the two boats with James and John, Peter and Andrew rowed back to shore.

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The servants of Zebedee and the servants of Peter's family could not believe what they saw. Their masters' sons rowing with all their might as the boats lay very low in the water and the boats heaped with fish. As the boats came close to shore, Andrew called out, "Don't just stand there gawking! Hurry, come out and help us so we don't lose any," and the servants waded out to the boats and helped to bring in the catch of a lifetime.

They were whooping and hollering for joy. "How did you do this? How did you do this?" They grabbed large baskets and began heaping the fish into them. James and John and Andrew were giving orders to the servants to take great care so they could not lose any of the catch, and they did not notice that Peter had walked away.

Peter was standing silently on the shore, sometimes looking out to the lake, sometimes looking down. He thought back to the wedding in Cana. Had not Jesus told the servants to fill the water pots with water at this wedding when the host had run out of wine? That was a useless command, or so it seemed, and yet, somehow the water became wine. He thought about the journey through Samaria. Jews rarely walked through Samaria, yet Jesus had insisted on going through this area as if he had an urgent appointment with someone. And there he met the woman of Sychar and his conversation with her led to blessing for an entire village. That was unexpected. He thought on the royal official in that very town of Capernaum whose son was healed and the many others who were touched by Jesus and cured. It seemed that unexpected and unusual things were always happening with and around Jesus as if he had knowledge of the future, knowledge of what was in peoples' hearts, knowledge of what was in a lake!

Peter thought about his grumbling. He thought about his annoyance when Jesus wanted to use his boat and his complete exasperation when Jesus wanted him to go back out to the lake during the heat of the day to fish again. Shame and guilt washed up to him with each wave from the lake. Others were rejoicing over the catch, but Peter was lost in thoughts of his own sin, his unbelief, and his lack of understanding about who this man really was. At that moment Jesus came up to him and looked deep into his eyes and his heart, but Peter fell down at the feet of Jesus and began to weep. He said, "It's no good, Jesus. It's no good. I am unworthy to follow you. Why don't you just continue your mission without me. Depart from me for I am a sinful man."

Break

When Jesus told Peter to take the boat out to the depths of the Galilee Sea, after working hard all night and after washing and mending the nets, Peter said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." Was Peter complaining? Was he full of unbelief? Was he just tired and wanted to go to bed after such a disappointing night? We don't know but we do know that he finally did take Jesus out to the lake.

He took Jesus into the deep waters, let down the nets and when the nets were full he had to have help from others to bring in all the fish. And while the others were amazed at what happened and were rejoicing, Peter's response was far different.

When they got back to land he fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man."

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Why did Peter say this, "I am a sinful man?" Perhaps it was that he had no faith that Jesus could take him to the right spot to fish. Peter, after all, was the expert fisherman. It was his livelihood. He knew the best places and for heaven's sake, you don't go fishing during the daytime on the Sea of Galilee. But God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts higher than ours. We might be expert fishermen, but he is the creator of fish, and lakes, and streams and if he knows all the stars by name, then he also knows all the fish in the sea!

Perhaps Peter responded this way to Jesus because he had been aware for some time about his bad attitudes and unbelief. He had seen Jesus do so many miracles. He had seen him heal his mother-in-law of a raging fever just a few days before but perhaps he still had some doubts about Jesus. And now in this latest miracle of kindness and power he had had enough of his bad attitudes and felt like he just wasn't cut out to follow Jesus. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!"

Have you ever felt that way? You really admire Jesus, you really like Jesus, you even love Jesus but as you look at your own life all you see are problems and sin, and even when Jesus wants to do something kind to you, you have a hard time accepting his gifts and a hard time following him. You just want to forget the whole thing. "Depart from me Lord," you say, "I can't do this. I can't follow you. I'm not good enough. Just leave me."

I find it interesting that when Peter saw the power of Jesus he did not say, "Depart from me for I am unqualified," but "depart from me for I am a sinful man." The power of Jesus was on display for Peter but Peter was struck by the holy character of Jesus at this moment. Others were counting the fish and rejoicing in their great haul. Peter was counting his sins and despairing over his unworthiness.

But Jesus said something that would change Peter's life forever, and what Jesus said to Peter is something he wants to say to you, too, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."

Jesus told him not to fear. Peter was afraid. He fell at the feet of Jesus and told Jesus to go away, to depart from him. He told him this because of his unworthiness and he told him this because of Jesus' holiness and he told him this because he feared what might happen to him if he continued to pretend to be a worthy follower of Jesus.

But Jesus knew this already about Peter. Jesus knew Peter's shortcomings. Jesus knew Peter's needs. Jesus knew the depths of Peter's heart just as he knew the depths of the lake where Peter had fished since a boy. He knew Peter's frailties and his fears and he said to him, "Peter, fear not!"

Such was the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ toward Peter and such is the grace of Jesus toward you and me. Jesus knows our shortcomings. Jesus knows our needs. Jesus knows the depths of our hearts and our frailties and fears and when we tell him, "Depart from me Lord, I am not worthy of you. I'm such a mess, you might as well forget about me," Jesus refuses to leave. He puts his hand of grace on our shoulder and with a smile on his face says to us with the depths of compassion, "Do not fear."

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Let me ask you this today. Do you feel unworthy of following Jesus? Have you seen Jesus do amazing things and yet you still find struggles in your heart. You want to follow Jesus but you know you are not really up to the task of following Him. Jesus says to you, "fear not."

"Do not fear" is one of the most frequently stated commands in the Bible. It has to be that way because we have so much to fear. We live in a fallen world. Terrible things happen because the earth is still under a curse from our sin. We live in a world where injustices often prevail and people live in fear because of the selfishness of others. We live in a world where people die and we fear being left alone. We live in world where the lure of sin is strong and our hearts often want to do what is wrong in spite of Jesus' kindness to us. Yes, we live in a world where opportunities for fear abound, but we must see that Jesus command is stronger than any fear in the world and we must remember that he says to us, "Fear not!"

Two thousand years previous to this event, another follower of God struggled with fear. After a great battle that caused Abraham to realize he had just made a lot of new enemies, God appeared to him and said, "**Do not fear**, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." Genesis 15:1

A few hundred years after that, right before the children of Israel went into the promised land, Moses said to them, "The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. **Do not fear** or be dismayed." **Deuteronomy 31:8**

When Joshua took the people into the land and when they were fighting great battles, Joshua said to the people, "Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you fight." Josh 10:25

When Israel was in exile in Babylon because of its sin, God said to them, "Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, **do not fear**. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" **Isaiah 40:9**

'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' **Isaiah 41:10**

And now, here on the shore of the lake that was called The Sea of Galilee, Jesus stood with another man, the fisherman Simon Peter and said to him, "do not fear."

Yes, the Bible is filled with this great command, "Do not fear," and this command comes from the all-powerful, all holy Lord who loves us deeply.

But Jesus had more words for Peter. He did not give him a command to stop fearing, only. He said something else. "Peter, from now on you will be catching men."

Jesus not only took Peter's fear away but he also directed him to his true life purpose to which he was calling him. Jesus could have said, "Yes, Peter, I know you are a sinner and a failure in life, but I love you and forgive you. So go back to your fishing business. I won't judge you but being a fisherman is about all you can hope to accomplish."

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No, Jesus didn't say that. He had picked Peter for a great task and was training him for this task. Peter had seen Jesus do great things and he wanted to follow Jesus but he didn't feel worthy even to be in Jesus' presence any longer but Jesus took his unworthiness away and his fear away and then pointed him in a new direction for life. At his moment of weakness, Jesus gave Peter the words of his life mission.

"Peter, you have been fishing for fish all your life. You have been a good fisherman and you know when to fish and where to go. But there is something far greater for you. I want you to become a new kind of fisherman. I want you to become a fisher of men. I will train you. All you have to do is follow me. Follow me, Peter. Follow me James and Andrew and John. Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."

And that day, Peter and Andrew, James and John left their boats, left their nets, left their families and followed Jesus.

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