



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
Sanford, North Carolina

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When Vocation Becomes Mission
Luke 5:1-11

I don't usually preach on Baptist Men's Day, but this year I am.

We have Baptist Men's Day and Baptist Women's Day each year to focus on the important contributions that men and women make in the life of our church. These contributions are often more than we can measure, but we pause to think about them and to celebrate and give thanks to God for them.

Baptist Men's Day is also a day of challenge—a challenge to live more fully as disciples of Jesus Christ on mission in the world with Him.

How can we do that? It's a challenge for laity as well as clergy, for the members of the church as well as its ministers.

The story of Simon Peter's conversion can help us with this. It's found in Luke 5:1-11.¹ Luke tells the story a bit differently than Mark or Matthew. Listen to it now as we hear the word of the Lord.

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, 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.

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 catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures are from the *New International Version* (NIV).

Simon's story

Simon Peter was a fisherman.

He didn't fish as a sport; he did it for a living. He had his own boat and business, and was in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Most of his fishing was done with nets. One kind of net was round with weights around the edge. The fisherman would wade into the water, cast it, and drag it back to himself with fish in it. The other was a dragnet that was attached to two boats. The boats would move through the water parallel to each other, then move toward each other until they were side by side to close the net. Occasionally, people did fish with a line, but it would be to catch a meal. The kind of fishing Simon did was commercial. He caught the fish, salted them down to preserve them, and then sold them. And he was pretty good at what he did.

But he was just an ordinary, everyday, regular working guy.

Now Simon had apparently already met Jesus at least once before. In Luke 4 we read how Jesus had gone to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and Jesus healed her. The healing was so instantaneous that she immediately got up and began to wait on Jesus and those who had come with Him.

So Simon already knew something about Jesus' power. He had seen what Jesus did for his wife's mother, or at the very least had heard about it if he wasn't there when it happened. He had either seen or heard how later that same day, people brought the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus (apparently at Simon's house), and Jesus healed the sick and cast out the demons. Simon knew Jesus wasn't just another rabbi or miracle-worker. But he still hadn't followed Jesus yet.

Then one day Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret (we usually know it as the Sea of Galilee). People were crowding around Him as he was teaching, and He saw a couple of fishing boats there on the shore. The fishermen weren't in them; they were washing their nets.

Jesus got into one of the boats. It belonged to Simon Peter. Jesus asked him to put out a little from the shore, giving Him a little space from the crowd. Simon did, and Jesus sat down and taught the people from the boat.

After a while, He finished His teaching for the day and told Simon to launch out where the water was deep and let down his nets for a catch.

Now Simon knew his stuff. He was a fisherman. That's what he did for a living. He knew that Jesus was a teacher, and maybe even knew He had been a carpenter. But Simon was a fisherman. He knew the lake. He knew his nets. He knew the fish. And he knew that he and his partners had worked hard all night long, and their nets had come up empty.

Simon also knew what had happened at his house in Capernaum when Jesus was there. And so he said:

"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so (literally, "at your word"), I will let down the nets."

What happened when he did blew Simon's mind! All of a sudden, they caught so many fish that the nets were beginning to break. When they signaled James and John for help, they came, and they ended up filling both boats so full of fish that they were beginning to sink.

Simon's response to all this is intriguing. As we would expect, he was astonished, along with his companions, at the enormity of the catch they had taken. But he was more than astonished. He was *frightened*. He knew Jesus was no ordinary man. He fell at Jesus' knees and begged Him to leave: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" What Simon called Jesus, the Greek word *kurios*, could simply mean "Sir," or it could mean "Lord." Here, Simon meant it as *Lord*.

But Jesus wouldn't leave. Instead, he told Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people" (5:10b).² And at that, Simon Peter and his partners pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Jesus' call

Did you notice how Jesus put His call to Simon Peter to follow Him? He put it in terms of Peter's livelihood, what we often call *vocation*.

Jesus called Simon Peter to follow Him and fish for people.

He called Peter to use what he knew best, his vocation, his daily work, but to use it for the kingdom of God.

Now obviously Jesus didn't call everybody to do that. For instance, Levi was a tax collector. His call meant leaving that all behind. After all, in that day tax collecting was a shady business.

And often when God calls someone to some kind of ministry, it's something totally different than what they've done before, and requires a whole new set of skills and a wholly different kind of training.

But sometimes God does call us to take what we have learned and the skills we have in our vocation and use them for the kingdom.

He might call us to do that right where we are and in our current role. What changes is not the place or the position we're in, but the ultimate purpose that we're doing it for. Our workplace becomes our mission field.

He might call us to take the skills and training and talents we've been using in our vocation and apply them in a different setting for a kingdom purpose, like medical or agricultural or other ministries on the mission field. And understand that the mission field might be in Haiti or Zimbabwe or Malaysia—or Sanford! That's what Simon Peter, along with his business partners James and John, and according to Matthew and Mark, Simon's brother Andrew all did. They left their nets and their boats and followed Jesus to fish for people!

You see, what it all boils down to is this: *When we're truly following Jesus as Lord, vocation becomes mission.* Everything about us, *including our vocation*, is to be *at His disposal*.

If He wants us to be on mission where we're currently working, we do it. If He wants us to take what we know from our vocation and apply it to kingdom work, we do it. If He calls us to leave it all behind and do His kingdom work in a totally different context or setting, we do it.

After all, He is *Lord*. He calls the shots. When we follow Him, our lives no longer belong to us; we belong to Him, lock, stock, and barrel, vocation and all.

From vocation to mission

What will it look like for vocation to become mission for the men of Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church?

² From *Today's New International Version* (TNIV).

The Lord Jesus may work through some of you on your current job. When your conversation is different, when the way you relate to the people you deal with at work each day reflects genuine Christian care and courtesy, when you're diligent and seek other people's best interests rather than promoting yourself and trying to feather your own nest, people will notice. They will see that there's something different about you. Who knows, they might even mention it or ask you about it. And then the door is wide open for a witness. You just might catch some of them for Jesus!

The Lord Jesus may call some of you, especially some of you who are retired or contemplating retirement, to take your talents and gifts and your vocational skills and experience and use them to reach out to our surrounding community, helping people who are in need. Some might need help in a crisis. Some might need help to get on their feet. Others might need some kind of training or expertise that they can't afford but you can offer them in the name of Christ. I would venture that there's enough collective skills, training, experience, and wisdom in this congregation that we could have a transforming effect on our community if we yielded and opened ourselves to Christ to work through us this way.

And yes, the Lord Jesus may be calling some of you to leave what you're doing now, either to use your vocational skills in another setting altogether, or to gain a whole new set of skills to use on mission with Christ in the world.

The question is, will you do what He's calling you to do? Will you be on mission with Christ in our community and the world? *Will your vocation become mission?*

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