

## Gospeled

### *The Everyday Disciple: Following Jesus One Step at a Time Sermon 1*

Luke 5:1-11

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On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11, ESV)

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People often ask me what my vision is for The Falls Church Anglican. It's simple: to do everything I can to keep us faithful to God's timeless and eternal vision for His Church. Put briefly, and not at all exhaustively, God's vision for a local church involves three things: *discipleship*, *community*, and *mission*. The church must be a place where God changes people. Those people, in turn, become the conduits through which God enacts good works and godly change in the world around us. And all these things give glory to God. This fall I want us to see together how God's call upon each individual Christian is meant to unfold in precisely this way:

**You are called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ; disciples are meant to be in deep fellowship with other disciples, and these disciples are then turned towards the world with a mission.**

Discipleship. Community. Mission. They are different angles of the same calling. Our sermon series is called *The Everyday Disciple: Following Jesus One Step at a Time*. It follows Jesus' calling, training, and sending out of the first disciples. In watching this unfold across the Gospels and into the book of Acts,

we will note ten essential marks of a disciple of Jesus. These aren't the only marks. But it seems that one can't be a healthy disciple without some manifestation of these ten traits, or marks.

Before jumping into our first mark, I want to make two more points by way of introduction. The first has to do with the very idea of a disciple. Most people I know who associate with Christianity refer to themselves as Christians, not disciples. However, at least a decade before Jesus' followers were called Christians, they were called disciples (Acts 11:26). And a disciple is, first and foremost, a *follower*.

Bookstores and blogs abound with material about leadership: *everyone is a leader*. There may be some truth to this. But the Bible makes a point that's far more insightful: *everyone is first and foremost a follower*. We are all following something or someone. No one is born in a vacuum and entirely cuts their own path. If we are to be effective leaders in whatever sphere of influence we are in, we must first and foremost be good followers—and, as our series will reveal, we must be followers of the right Lord.

A second note of introduction. As we consider what discipleship is by looking at Jesus' first followers, an image emerges that is both compelling and daunting. Watching them "leave everything and follow" (Luke 5:11), and hearing Jesus' summons to "take up our cross daily," can leave us feeling like this is impossible. But we must remember that the Gospel showcases the disciples' failings, too: their inability to understand, lack of power at times to heal, and their arrogance and pride. They fall asleep when they were supposed to be praying, one betrays Jesus, and all defect during His hour of greatest need.

**To be a disciple is not to become perfect overnight. Rather, it's to make a heart commitment to Jesus and then, by His grace working in us, to take one more step in His direction and under His leadership each day. One step at a time.**

Let's turn now to the first mark of a disciple. We begin where Jesus did. With His calling of Peter to follow Him. The scene takes place at the beginning of Luke 5, but what has happened in Luke 4 sets the stage. Jesus has inaugurated His ministry by preaching and healing, and He summarizes His message and purpose at the close of chapter 4, where He says to an audience in one town: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).

He came to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. The words "good news" translates as a single Greek word that comes from the term *euangelion*. Another translation would be "Gospel." The word literally means good news. *Euangelion* announced a great historical event, such as the

enthronement of a king or a great victory won that would change the conditions and often future of those who heard about it. It also called for a response.

Jesus' good news, or Gospel, is unique. Not only is its subject weighty, the Kingdom of God. There is also something about its essential content that makes it uniquely powerful and transformative: Jesus' Gospel is good news about grace.

**Put succinctly, grace is God's unmerited favor, kindness, and blessing toward us.  
The Gospel is Good News about the grace of God, and that grace changes everything.**

As we turn now to the very beginning of Peter's life as a disciple—to this encounter he has with Jesus—, we will see that Jesus Himself is the bringer of this grace. And as we walk through the scene, we'll highlight three aspects of the grace He brings, which display just why this grace is such good news: This grace pursues, reveals, and reconciles.

## **I. Grace Pursues**

Grace is good news because grace is God's pursuit of us. If a modern author were writing the story of Peter meeting Jesus, they would likely begin with Peter's own journey: *"The fisherman, perhaps, is unsettled in life and searching for something—searching for meaning, searching for his true self..."* However, this is a story about God seeking Peter. Let's see how God pursues Peter, and what it has to do with Jesus. Stepping way back then zeroing in, much has happened to find Jesus sitting in Peter's boat.

### **How God Pursued Peter**

The eternal God made Peter, and He knows Peter. God took on flesh and came to dwell in Peter's world, right next to Peter's home village of Capernaum. Jesus then grew up over thirty years and launched a preaching ministry that Peter would have caught wind of. Jesus now has left preaching in the synagogues and made His way right into the middle of Peter's work-life—the shore of Lake Gennesaret on a morning after Peter has just come in from fishing. Jesus doesn't stay on the shore, though, He gets into Peter's boat. Jesus doesn't stop at teaching the crowds, He turns and addresses Peter directly. And He doesn't merely teach Peter; Jesus gives an order to Peter: "put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (5:4), an order that forces Peter to respond to Jesus, either with a bit of faith, or a bit of doubt.

Here is the point. When we see Jesus Christ in Peter's boat, we are seeing God's pursuit of Peter, not Peter's pursuit of God. This is grace because it shows us that God is occupied with thinking of us and moving towards us, and God is this far more fervently than we can imagine.

## **How God Pursues Us Today**

Knowing this grace, that God seeks us, transforms our world and daily lives into a theatre of the activity of God. *How might God be speaking to you, you ask?* God speaks to us most clearly and decisively through His Word, but often in the process of turning our attention to His voice there, He uses other means, such as His Creation, this world, to speak of His existence: "the heavens declare the glory of God ... and day to day pours out speech" (Psalm 19:1, 2; see also Romans 1:20).

God also gets our attention through events—people we meet or struggles we may face. C. S. Lewis famously wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>1</sup>

Yet another way God speaks to us is by our conscience. I was reflecting recently on how exactly God got my attention when I was younger. Many things went into it, including growing up in a Christian home, but I was so uninterested in Church and faith through high school and into college it seemed a miracle to me that I ended up not just a Christian, but a pastor! *How did God do that?* Something that struck me—and maybe some of you teenagers or younger people can relate—was my conscience. Plenty of opportunities came along in high school and college to go headlong down a path that was more of the world than the Kingdom of God. But there was something inside of me, more than a voice, more like a moral appetite that could never be comfortable with sin. I was a sinner to be sure, and still am. It was like I had a sense inside of me of the goodness and righteousness of God and would never be at peace unless I was walking with Him.

This was my conscience speaking. The Bible teaches we all have a conscience (Romans 2:14-16; Romans 9:1-2). Like an internal GPS, our conscience knows where we are in relation to where God desires us to be. Sometimes it shouts, sometimes it whispers, but our conscience always says, "*This is the way, walk in it.*"<sup>2</sup> This week, open your ears to for the voice of God.

**He is seeking you—every tree and every star speaks of His Divine attributes; every pang of compassion for another person whispers of them being created in His image; every unmet longing is an invitation to seek satisfaction in Him.**

When Jesus shows up on that shore and gets into Simon Peter's boat, we learn something decisive about the Gospel: it is the good news about Grace because in it, God comes to find us, no matter how far we've strayed.

## **II. Grace Reveals**

A second reason the Gospel is good news about grace is seen in how the Gospel reveals. It reveals to Peter, and us, what is most true about the things that are most important. It reveals to us who God is, who we are, and what's really wrong. Watch how this happens for Peter as the scene continues.

The miracle in verses 6-7 is of an astounding catch of fish. But the point of it is not to bolster Peter's fishing business. Rather, the point of the miracle becomes clear in verse 8 when we see Peter's reaction: through this demonstration of sovereign power over the sea and creatures therein, Jesus is revealing something to Peter about who He is and who Peter is. "But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Peter's response is unexpected; he's fallen to his knees in reverence. He's referring to himself as a sinful man, unworthy of Jesus' presence. *What's going on?*<sup>3</sup> Jesus is revealing to Peter something of His divinity—in Jesus, Peter is encountering God. This is why Peter switches titles for Jesus. In verse 5 he called Him "master," the appropriate title for an officer of some importance. Here, however, while kneeling down, he changes the address to "Lord," more than a polite address but a "recognition of sovereignty."<sup>4</sup>

It's not only a clear image of God that Peter is getting, however, he is also seeing himself in a new light: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). A revelation of sorts is unfolding for Peter: God is getting big, and Peter is getting small. And this is all very good.

### **Reveals who God is**

A.W. Tozer wrote, "What we think about when we think about God is the most important thing about us." If this is true, then we ought to wonder where our ideas about God come from, and how trustworthy

they are. The Bible reveals a picture of a God who is loving, yes, but also Almighty, All-Holy, and All-Knowing. And who will by no means brush wrongdoing and injustices under the rug. Standing before Him is less like being in the presence of a prayer vigil candle and more like standing on the precipice of an erupting Mount Vesuvius. God is pure holiness. The grandeur and power of God are not easy for us to grasp in our mind. The Gospel is grace because in it we see more clearly who God is. Loving, yes, but also righteous and holy.

### **Reveals who Peter is**

However, this is not all that is revealed to Peter. Peter learns more about Peter. Who you truly are, is who you are before God. We all hide from each other, and even from ourselves. But we stand utterly exposed before God, all of the time. To see ourselves before God's eyes is to know who we really are. Before God's all-knowing eyes, Peter can only declare himself "a sinner."

### **Reveals what the problem is**

I don't think Peter is mainly thinking of a few wrong things he's done, or those good things he's left undone. I think what he senses, like a spouse who's been unfaithful finally standing exposed before his wife, is how distant His heart has been from God, and how many other things he's loved and valued, more than he's loved and valued God.

It's not that Peter has done some sinning. It's that he's a sinner. Something about his very nature is unworthy of the presence of God Almighty. Peter is separated from the source of His life, and the true desire of His soul. That is what it means to be "a sinner."

*It is a tragedy to live life not aware of who you really are. Because if you don't know yourself, how can you really give yourself in love to anyone? And if you don't know God, how can you have a relationship with Him? And if you don't know yourself, how can you know you have a need for Jesus?*

When Jesus opens Peter's eyes to who He is and who Peter is, we learn a second thing about the Gospel: it is good news of grace, because, in it, God reveals to us what is most true, about what is most important.

With Peter kneeling here, as a terrified sinner asking His Lord to depart, we reach the climactic moment of the story: *What will Jesus do next? Will He cast the man away? What will Jesus say?*

### III. Grace Reconciles

We read in verse 10 words that are balm to our souls: “And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid;’” (Luke 5:10). Simple words but hidden behind them is a whole universe of meaning. And Peter has little idea at this point, what this statement will require of Jesus. The reason Peter the sinner does not need to be afraid is that Jesus has come to die for Peter’s sin. Jesus will take Peter’s place as the one who cries out before God, “I am a sinner, depart from me.”

#### The Cross

All this takes place on the Cross, when, to quote Peter from several decades later, “Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus bore Peter’s sin so that Peter can live. Jesus took the just penalty for Peter’s wrongs, so Peter could be forgiven. This is grace in laser-focus.

What is wonderful about this scene in the boat, and the shadow of the cross of Christ we see in Jesus’ words, is that it captures the real heart of the matter: Jesus came to *reconcile* Peter back to God. The image of Jesus standing before Peter in the close quarters of a boat and saying “*do not be afraid*” is a window onto the heart of God in the Gospel: all this is transpiring because God loves us and wants us to be near unto Him, to enjoy Him, to find our life and hope in Him.

The Gospel is good news about grace because it’s the news the Jesus has brought us back to God. And the way this happens transforms the heart.

#### Approaches to God

It seems that the human heart has two default modes for how it approaches connection with God: *performance* and *relativism*. Performance refers to the classic idea of religion. Here, God is perfect and has standards and in order to find favor with Him, we must live up to His standards. If we can keep the rules well enough, He’ll love us. The problem here is twofold. Firstly, our view of God is skewed; He’s a distant taskmaster always on the verge of rejecting us for not being good enough. And secondly, our view of ourselves is skewed; either we’re utterly unlovable because we’ve sinned, or we start to become self-righteous because of all the so-called good things we do. The performance approach won’t do.

There is the other side of the coin, too. What I'd called the approach of relativism. Here, you don't make your way up to God's level. You instead bring God down to your level. God has no real standards outside of loving you just as you are. He never judges, only affirms. The problems here are that, firstly, your view of God ends up looking like yourself in the mirror, and this isn't a God you'll ever truly fall in love with. Secondly, you never change. If God is just where you are at, there is no one to guide you to something higher. And lastly, you need to know there are moral standards. When you see the brokenness and injustice around you, you need to know there is such a thing as an absolute standard of justice and a God who will bring it about.

We need to know God takes sin seriously. And we need to know He loves us even though we are sinners. There is only one place this happens: The Cross of Jesus Christ. The cross holds together justice and mercy. On the cross, God demonstrates how seriously He takes injustice and sin because Jesus is paying the price for sin. But at the same time, on the cross, God shows us how much He loves us because Jesus is dying in our place. On the cross, justice and mercy kiss. And Christians call this grace.

## **How this Grace, the Grace of the Cross, transforms us**

1. It melts our hearts—communicating to us that God loves us so much. God leaps over the wall of our sin and saves us right where we are.
2. But it also calls us to something higher. It says:

*Look at God's Son. He calls you to be like Him, to be His disciple. He's totally excepted you forever, now in His strength, you start this adventure of following.*

The final part of our story involves calling and response—and opens the way for the rest of our sermon series. Once Peter is gospeled—got by the grace of God in Jesus—he is then called to follow. What this following looks like will occupy us the rest of our time. But this doesn't mean we move past the Gospel of grace.

**The Gospel isn't the tarmac we take off from—launching into the Christian life.  
The Gospel is the plane we fly in, each moment of each day of discipleship.  
Grace. Always grace.**



Non-believer, take a step into this grace. Say to God—*yes, I am a sinner. I need the cross of Jesus Christ.* And hear God say over your life: *do not be afraid.* And be transformed from a sinner to a son, from a defector to a daughter.

Christians, become a conduit of grace. Be that person where others can come and have evil returned for good. Be that place where good things happen to undeserving people. Why? Because that is what happened to you. The Gospel is good news because it's news of God's grace, and that grace changes everything. Let us live in it.

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## Endnotes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. As a biblical example, the Psalmist says, "before I was afflicted, I went astray" (Ps 119), suggesting that God got their attention during a hardship.
2. "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).
3. Commentators note similarities between this scene and other scenes in the Bible when God reveals himself to people: Isaiah sees God on the throne and cries, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6); Saint John sees Jesus in all His glory at the beginning of Revelation and says, "I fell at his feet as though dead" (Rev 1:17).
4. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (BECNT, Grand Rapids, MI: 1994), 459.