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Sermon Series: *Good News in Strange Places*, No. 2

The Illogical

October 10, 2021

Luke 5:1-11 [NIV]

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were 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 fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Finding good news in strange places – that's what we're doing in these weeks.

Some might think that finding good news *anywhere* in these days is something of a miracle, but it is out there – there's lots of good news, especially for followers of Jesus.

The thing is, though – sometimes that good news is found *when* and *where* we'd least expect it; it comes at surprising times and in strange places.

For example, last Sunday, we saw that good news can be found even in the midst of suffering.

If we are, like the Corinthian believers, experiencing cultural conflict and suffering hardship because of faith in Christ, that's actually a good thing, because that very likely means we are fulfilling our roles as ambassadors: we are faithfully representing the Kingdom of God in this earthly nation in which we live, whose values and priorities are so very different from God's.

As God's ambassadors here, it only makes sense that we feel those differences from time to time. And when we do, we take those moments as indications or reminders that although we're assigned to represent God's Kingdom in this place, we and our priorities and values are, in fact, of another place – another kingdom.

Our loyalties rest with another king.

So, if we're experiencing hardship, that means for the follower of Jesus that we're likely "ambassadoring" well – and that's actually good news.

Now today, I'd like to look at the good news we can find in another strange place, specifically in those things that happen in our lives that make no sense to us. I want us to see the good news in *the illogical*.

Now, I'm not saying, "theological," although there's good news there too. And actually, sometimes it can make no sense.

But I'm not saying "theological." I'm saying, *the illogical*: those circumstances in which we find ourselves that just don't reasonably and rationally follow. We find one of those in that passage that was just read for us.

Luke's gospel, Chapter 5. If you haven't already, would you turn back there with me?

There are several illogical things in this passage, at least by first century standards.

One of those is simply Jesus preaching – teaching – by a lake, and out of the back of a fishing boat, of all things. Those of us who grew up with this story – this account, we sort of read right past this. But this was strange.

I would think it is safe to say that no one there had ever seen anything like that before: a rabbi, a traveling teacher, teaching a crowd (a big crowd) by the side of a lake, from inside a boat, out in the water.

It was a great idea – a Jesus-sized innovation – and one, by the way, that centuries later John Wesley picked up on and saw great advantage in – not so much teaching from a boat, but going to people where they are.

While Wesley's contemporaries mainly stuck to their pulpits and sanctuaries, Wesley preached in the fields and on the roads and anywhere there was a group of people who might listen.

He saw the need to meet people where they were, very literally, and then to bring Jesus to them there. That's one thing that caused so many to come to Jesus through the Methodist movement.

And that's our call as Methodists today: not to leave Jesus in the sanctuary, but to take Him with us wherever we go and to use whatever means we can to make Him known there, wherever we are – wherever a divine moment presents itself.

That's evangelism, and it is in no way exclusively the pastor's work to be done on Sunday morning. Evangelism is the Christian's work for every day, in every circumstance, in every place.

That Jesus did what He did as He did it was itself unorthodox, if you will, and probably seemed *intriguingly illogical* to all those there – and it was likely *offensively illogical* to the religious professionals.

But, without compromising truth, it was the method of bringing the gospel, the good news, that worked for Jesus, and this speaks to His practical nature. Jesus never departed from truth, but He always used what worked – even that which seemed unconventional and even illogical in His day.

But that's not the only illogical thing here in this passage. I want to look at the one down in verse 4, where Jesus tells Peter to take another go at fishing.

Here's the thing about that: on the surface, everything about that idea was wrong, and Peter knew it.

Peter was a professional fisherman.

Jesus was a carpenter, first of all. Compared to Peter, what did he know about fishing? That's what Peter had to be thinking. Because if you know anything about fishing, you know that you don't catch fish in the mid to late morning when the sun is up and the day is getting warm.

You catch fish at night or in the early, early morning when it's darker out and the water is calm and the air is cool.

Jesus' suggestion here would be like someone saying this morning, "Hey, you've been out all night hunting deer, and you did not see even one. I know that. But here, take your bow (or rifle or whatever) and go hunting right now – not out in the woods, but just go over to the gym in Building C and see what you find there."

What a ridiculous thing to suggest! Every person here knows very well that there are no deer in the gym.

There *are* bugs of different kinds, certainly, because this is the season when bugs start coming in out of the fields around us here. There are crickets. There are stink bugs – those things are everywhere, so you'll find those in the gym. There may be a mouse or two or twenty.

There may well be a couple of teenagers hiding over there trying to get out of coming to worship – actually, I can think of a couple adults that could be doing the same thing.

But we all know there are no deer over there.

That is something of how illogical Jesus' words had to seem to Peter.

But even more than that, Peter and his compatriots had already been out all night fishing and had caught nothing. They knew very well that if nothing could be caught at the best of times, it would be a fruitless waste to try in the worst of times.

They knew the right time to fish, *not Jesus*.

They knew the right *places* to fish, not Jesus.

They knew the right *depths* to put their nets, not Jesus.

Besides, they had already been up all night, or the biggest part of it, and so they were tired.

And, they were not done with their work yet. Before they could rest, they had work yet to do on their nets. They had to fix them from where they had dragged and torn on rocks, and they had to dry them so they wouldn't rot prematurely.

They weren't done with the day's responsibilities, and they needed to get done and get some sleep, so they could go out again, fishing, the coming night.

And Jesus had already interrupted their routine for the day. His using their boat had already put them behind schedule, you see?

Now, not that it wasn't worth it.

Not that they weren't willing. We don't know all that He said here, but we know it was well, well worth hearing, because no one drew crowds like Jesus.

So, no one was complaining about the time invested in listening to Him.

But still, there was all this work yet to do, you see?

So, there was no logical reason to go fishing now, and you hear that frustration or fatigue thinly veiled in Peter's reply to Jesus.

But, at the same time, Peter is remembering what he has heard about this Jesus – about some pretty amazing things He has done.

So, Peter, in these few seconds of conversation, is weighing all this in his mind and trying to figure out how to reply.

Think about that for a minute. Isn't it remarkable how many thoughts and perspectives our minds can process in just split seconds?

We get asked a question that requires some evaluation, and we do it – right there on the fly. We process the requirements, the moral components, the rights and wrongs, the odds of success, how much time and effort a thing will take, and how much we have to give it. And it all happens in just an instant, so that a second or so later, we give an answer.

Our brains and how fast they work: it's all just remarkable, and it points to a creator. It's evidence of God, if we'll let it be so in our lives.

And Peter does.

He's tired and likely hungry, with miles yet to go before he sleeps. His schedule has been interrupted, and now here is this illogical call for even more interruption is before him.

And yet he agrees. Why? Only one reason: faith.

What Peter agrees to do here: there's no logic to it at all.

It's about faith. Trust in Jesus.

That is why he tries again.

That's why he dumps his nets over the side.

All reasonable assessment and evaluation would say, "Your time would be far better spent doing other things."

But Jesus says, "Peter, do this."

And Peter does it.

That's faith.

That's why Peter came to be such a leader: he did what Jesus asked even when it went against all sensible human reason.

And look what God gave in response!

Yes, He gave the biggest load of fish they'd ever caught – more than two boat's worth.

But far more than that – far more than the fish, God gave Peter here *three* tremendous gifts.

The *first* was this brutally honest picture of Peter himself and of who Peter really was. God provided Peter with this sudden, startling, disturbing flash of insight into the sinfulness of his own heart that was so powerful – so clear and incisive – that it knocked Peter to the ground and moved him to beg Jesus to go away.

You say, "How was this good news? It sounds awful to me."

Ah, it's good news because this is the point to which every person must come before redemption can occur.

Before any of us can be whole – before we can be the person God intends us to be, we have to see ourselves as

we really are. We need an accurate mirror in which to look.

Most of us, when we see ourselves, it's like we're looking into one of those carnival mirrors: you know, the ones that make us look distorted, too tall or short, too fat or thin. It's very hard for most people to get an accurate reflection of who they are.

But that's what Jesus provided to Peter here.

This was way more impressive and provocative to Peter than even the fish, you see? For the first time in his life, Peter saw himself for who he was before God – and it wasn't pretty.

We think we're so good, so competent, so powerful, so professional. Like Peter, we think we know so much – until we compare ourselves with the God who made us.

Only then do we see what we are and what we're not, and only then do we realize our great need for grace – God's grace, you see?

That's where life as God designed it begins – when we see our need for grace.

Realization of who we are and who God is: that's the first bit of good news for Peter in this whole, illogical situation. If he had stuck to the sensible and rational, he would have missed it.

And the *second* is forgiveness. Redemption.

It is what's behind the first part of what Jesus said to him in verse ten there, "*Don't be afraid.*"

You know, nothing Jesus could have said right there would have been more powerful to Peter. Jesus knew right where Peter was and just what he needed.

Reverential fear, prompted by an awareness of unworthiness, always leads to God's forgiveness. Only those who realize their unworthiness before God are worthy of Jesus' companionship.

Even in light of Peter's realization of himself, Jesus' declaration to him that all would be well was not just good news; that was *tremendous* news, and a tremendous relief!

Isn't it good news to know that we're forgiven when we know we need to be? Not much beats that, really.

That was God's second piece of good news to Peter to come out of this whole, illogical event.

And then the *third*: Jesus gives Peter the good news of *purpose*. He gives him something *eternally worthwhile* to do.

He says to Peter there at the end of verse 10, "*From now on, you will catch people.*"

Now, literally, Jesus says, "men," but He means men and women and boys and girls. Peter will fish for people for the sake of Jesus, so that they can experience the same thing – the same good news – that Peter did: a realization of their sinfulness and their need before God, and then of God's forgiveness of them, and then receiving God's purpose for their own lives.

Now, it's important to say that this idea of purpose has nothing, really, to do with vocation. This isn't Jesus saying that missionaries are more important than fishermen or plumbers or teachers or bankers or farmers.

What Jesus is saying, rather, is that fishermen and plumbers and teachers and bankers and farmers are all missionaries first.

Who we *are* is *not* what we *do* for our living.

Who we are: we're *ambassadors*, right? We're ambassadors for Jesus in the world in which we live.

That's what Jesus made Peter here, an ambassador.

This was Peter's ordination, if you will, to ambassadorship. It was his commissioning to represent Jesus in his world and to invite others – any and all who would – to citizenship in Jesus' nation, to jump into Jesus' boat.

And that is the purpose of every follower of Christ: to fish for people, to invite people to Jesus.

And that doesn't change according to vocation.

Our methods may change from job to job and vocation to vocation. But our purpose – the reason we live – never does.

It is a purpose – a mission – that's far greater than circumstance, far greater than station of life or rank or salary or degree.

It's a purpose that we have whether we're book smart, street smart, or not smart, you see?

God wants to use us all, with the gifts He's given, for this cause. He uses us in our differences to fulfill His goals.

And that's good news.

We don't have to be this or that or the other for God to use.

We just have to be obedient to Him, as Peter was here, even when obedience seems utterly illogical to us.

Reason and logic have their place, certainly. They're God's gifts to us.

But as someone once said, "Obedience is more important than reason, if it's God who is giving the command."

You see, like so many of God's miracles, the catch of fish here in Peter's life was to make sure Peter knew it was God who was giving the command.

This is exactly why God sometimes leads us into totally unreasonable and illogical situations. And I've noticed that He especially does this with people who are logic-oriented: people who like to be in control, people who depend, by default, on sensibility and reason.

I think God especially loves to lead those kinds of people into totally unreasonable and illogical situations in order to convince them that He's the one who's leading us and He's the one who's speaking – because we'd never believe Him otherwise.

There will always be good news in the illogical encounters of our lives, if God is, indeed, the one who has led us there.

Will you believe that?

Will you count on it?

Will you look for it?

If you will, God will give you just the good news you need for that moment – and He'll do it even in the strangest of places and circumstances.

If you see your need to put God's word and the leading of His Spirit before logic and reason in your life, I

invite you to do that, to simply pray, “Lord, make me more dependent on You than I am on my own ability to figure things out – to figure You out. Help me trust You more than I trust reason and logic.”

Pray that prayer, and then hold on, because He’ll answer it – and it will most likely be quite a ride when He does.

Closing Song: *Trusting Jesus*

Benediction:

Somewhere this week, I saw that phrase that our president is using, “Build back better,” you know, for the Covid recovery stuff?

I think that phrase could be far more accurately used here in Jesus’ encounter with Peter, because through this adventure in fishing, Jesus takes Peter apart – but then builds him back better. Jesus builds Peter back into someone who trusts God more than reason, more than expertise, more than logic, more than himself.

May Jesus do what He did for Peter in *all* of us in these days.