

Divine Detours: Finding Purpose by Following Jesus

Luke 5:1-11

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

I like to talk to my son Jackson — who's a big astronomy fan — about all things space oriented. And that's gotten us chatting about some pretty heavy subjects.

Recently I'd read about the idea of scaling down the size of our Sun to something we can more readily imagine — a grain of sand — and then scaling down outer space in line with that. It seems that if the Sun were the size of a grain of sand, the size of our galaxy, the Milky Way, would still be about the distance from the Earth to the Moon — about 300,000 kilometers, a very LONG way from here! What's more, scientists also calculate that the total number of grains of sand on the face of the earth doesn't come close to equaling the number of stars in existence. In fact, astronomers say there are about 10,000 stars in the universe for each grain of sand on our planet.

Can you fathom that? I cannot. I can bend down on a beach, grab a handful of sand, and only know that the number of grains I'm grabbing are far beyond countable for my puny brain.

Yet, our God is INFINITELY BIGGER and MORE AWESOME than the unimaginably large universe he created. He's far beyond the unfathomable science of space.

In short, God is big ... we are small ... and yet the creator of the universe loves each and every one of us so much that not only did he die in our place so that we might live, he also has a purpose for each one of our lives.

Pastor Scott talked to us about that spiritual truth on Sunday when we studied the first 11 verse of Luke chapter 5, the critical moments when Jesus calls his first disciples — and how that relates to what Jesus calls us to do and is asking us to do as his disciples in this time and place.

The Bible describes Peter as an explosive, impulsive, but still an amazingly devoted follower of Jesus. In this passage, Peter is just getting to know who Jesus. In the middle of his sermon just off the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus knows Peter and his pals had a bad night of fishing — yet he asks Peter to go out and try again anyway. Peter's response to Jesus is so very Peter-esque ... and there are two parts to it. The first part is an apparent holler at the son of God! "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" Wow. Peter's outrage is right out in the open, and he doesn't hold back — the exclamation point is even in the English Standard Version of the Bible that Pastor Scott uses! The second part shows Peter turning on a dime — and it's a pivot to trust

and obedience: “But at your word I will let down the nets.” He decides, in the end, to do what Jesus asks. He’s taking his Master at his word. Should it be any different for us? Peter determines to obey Jesus even when he doesn’t understand why. Should it be any different for you and me?

The result of Peter’s determination to what the Lord asks him to do is a big catch of fish, so much so that “their nets were breaking. 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.” (vv. 6-7)

God wants to pour out blessings on our lives like this — but we have to put ourselves in positions to receive the Lord’s blessings, and it starts with doing what God tells us to do. Pastor Scott said at such times when blessings enter our lives it can be quite overwhelming, primarily because we get to see the Divine at work — and on our behalf. We know we don’t deserve it, and like Peter in the next verse, we fall to our knees and tell Jesus: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (v. 8)

Isn’t Peter’s reaction the core of the gospel? Peter knows right down to his bones that he’s in the presence of God Almighty who cannot tolerate sin’s presence. But it is for this very reason that Jesus came down to earth to walk beside us, to feel our pain for himself, to suffer and die in our place, and to rise again to new life so that we all can have new lives by believing in him.

Indeed, God is big ... we are small ... yet he wants us all with him forever.

Wasn’t it cool how Pastor Scott offered us the tidbit of insight that the word “astonished” in verse 9 (“For [Peter] and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken ...”) is one of only three instances that it’s used in the New Testament? We see it used again in Acts 2 after the Holy Spirit falls upon the disciples at Pentecost, and they begin speaking in foreign languages they don’t know — which quickly gets the attention of people in Jerusalem: “And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’” Fittingly, Peter’s sermon follows in Acts 2, resulting in 3,000 listeners believing the gospel — a far cry from the man who got angry at Jesus’ suggestion to try another round of fishing after coming up with nothing the first time!

Pastor Scott drove home the final point from our passage in Luke: When Peter falls to his knees and confesses his sinful nature to Jesus, the Lord replies, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” With that, according to verse 11, “when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

Fear is limiting and debilitating, Pastor Scott reminded us. Instead, we must trust Jesus despite our fear — and then rely on his power to do the things he has for us to do in this life. On top of that, we need to be willing to leave everything as we follow Jesus.

Whatever is impeding our walks with Christ, we have to leave behind at the shore. As Pastor Scott said, some of those things might be considered good things or positive things — but if they're holding us back from moving forward in the Lord, we need to toss them to the side.

Pastor Scott also reminded us about another time Peter and disciples encountered Jesus on the shore — after he had risen from the dead. In John 21, we find Jesus restoring Peter — who not long before denied three times that he even knew Jesus — by asking Jesus three times if he loved him “more than these.” Pastor Scott noted that once we believe in Jesus, we're saved and the Lord grants us eternal life — but that doesn't mean we don't need to continually evaluate ourselves and let God shine his light upon us so we can see if we've drifted back to old ways of thinking, ways of living. Indeed, we need to be willing to wake up each morning, confess our sins and turn from them as we rededicate ourselves to Jesus.

Let us keep on remembering that God is big ... we are small ... and yet he also has a purpose for each one of our lives.

Now let's get to it!