

**Gone Fishing**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**Luke 5:1-11**

My daughter Mary Allen loves Curious George. Her grandmother recently gave her a book about George's first fishing excursion. It seems George saw someone at the lake having a go with a cane pole and a bobber, and he wanted to try the same. So George went home, and he got a mop handle, and some string, and a shower curtain hook, and some cake, and off he went. To George's dismay, the fish ate the cake, but they didn't take the hook. And you know what George did? He decided if he couldn't have a fish, then the fish couldn't have his cake. So George gave up his pursuit of fishing, and he just sat down on the dock and ate his cake.

I think George may be on to something there!

In first-century Palestine, there wasn't much cake to be had. And even if you had some cake, it sure didn't pay any bills. Old King Herod knew folks were bad off, and he knew they were desperate for work, too. And he also knew that all those folks in the Galilee were sitting on a gold mine with all those fine fish in a lake big enough to be called a sea. Of course, those fishermen were like sharecroppers – they didn't have the means to fish to scale, nor to market to the masses. But Herod did. And unlike George, people like Simon Peter, and James, and John didn't have the luxury to choose cake over fish. So Herod told the peasants, "Go and get me my fish!!! I promise it'll be worth your while!!!"

Every morning, they rose early, set out in their boats, and labored with their nets. Each day, they hoped for a haul, a catch so big it would change their stars. Each evening, they had full nets alright. It's just that the nets weren't full of fish. They were full of empty promises, and broken dreams, and the other discards reserved for the peasant lifestyle. But one day boys, we're gonna catch a whole lot of fish, and all those fish are gonna solve a whole lot of our problems.

Now imagine one day, a stranger comes to town. And he says, "Friends, just do me a favor, cast out your nets one more time." And you oblige. And whoa! You pull 'em back up, and there's snappers, groupers, white fish, and fish you didn't even know existed. And you start shaking your net, and they're up to your ankles, and then to your knees, and then to your chest. And you ask your neighbor if he'll help you out. And in a minute or two, they're up to his chest, too. And there are SO many fish, your boats begin to sink. And the catch, THE CATCH, that thing you've longed for, and labored for, it's too big. It's so big, it swallows you.

The stranger offers his hand. "Come with me," he says. "Step onto dry land. And start fishing for people instead."

We want this to be a story about fishing. God needs good anglers. And Jesus wants a boatload of people for this new kingdom.

But this isn't a story about fishing. It's a story of pursuit. Well actually, it's a story about what we should pursue. We live on dry land, and if there are salmon in nearby Lake Norman, I'm gonna let you try them first. The fish we pursue are just things – they could just as well be sales leads, or gold, or bitcoin, or votes, or any other commodity. The fish represent the manufactured happiness we pursue. They

represent the things we think we need to acquire to have value and purpose, to be successful in Herod's world.

Jesus' little demonstration shows his new friends (and us as well) that this hoarding of stuff – fish for the disciples, or whatever more modern, stinky substance you want to substitute for yourself – chokes and swallows the life out of them (and us, too). Who wants to drown in things?

So Jesus invites them (and us!) to pursue relationships with neighbors.

Who needs two ten-ton boats full of fish, when two cans of sardines and five packs of saltines will feed the masses? Who needs a bag of Herod's gold, when your cloak, and your sandals, and the kindness of strangers will bring you shelter, and hospitality, and new friendship? Who needs a glamorous banquet, complete with one of those Brazilian steakhouse 'stop n' go' cards, when a loaf of bread and a simple cup will fill you up? Who needs the fine wines, and the fancy robes, and the marble palaces, when in the company of neighbors God's kingdom is made manifest?

Herod's world wants you to spin your wheels pursuing lifeless resources. Herod wants you to plunge your nets into deep waters. And when you pull up your net, can you feel the resistance? The tugging, the pulling, the straining, all of it jerking away your energy. And the payoff of this consumption is lifelessness. It distracts you from community. And it distracts you from God.

Jesus urges us to stop trying to swim, or tug, or pull against the current; to stop trying to build, and move, and contain so many resources. Instead, Jesus implores us to start sharing our resources: our time, our lives, our love, our hearts, our spirits with others. Because these things aren't baits or traps. They do not jerk people back into step; they invite people into something authentic and whole.

And when we catch a glimpse of that gentle, common current, just like Simon Peter, and James, and John, we too find ourselves leaving the lure of Herod's everything for the promise and fulfillment of God's enough.

Sardis Baptist Church, this morning, we have the opportunity to seek a table. It does not require your toil. It does not require a net, or a hook, or a line, or a shovel, or any kind of container to retrieve its contents. It simply says, "You are welcome, because you are God's." And while this table may not be the everything you always imagined – that is, the big catch, or the final score, or the ultimate pay-off – this table is most certainly enough. And this table is always for you. And at it, you will always find God's welcome.

May it always be so!