

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

Most every day as I begin my walk, the first sight I see as I leave my home is Dan. Basketball in hand, dribbling, shooting, day after day he is out in his driveway practicing. When the weather is cold gloves are on his hands. When snow has fallen, he has cleared the concrete around the basket. He is giving his heart to basketball. He reminds me of myself.

Basketball, my first love - the dream that filled my heart. Alone - with my brother - with my friends - every day found me shooting, dribbling, jumping. Dreaming - dreaming of one day making the varsity - dreaming of being on the starting team - dreaming of the shot at the buzzer that would make me a hero.

But along the way there were small rewards: the snap of the net when a shot was just right - a fake and a drive to the basket that would left the defender shaking his head - shooting the ball as far as I could fling it and seeing it swish.

I wonder if God had given me great success at basketball, and Jesus had come along at the height of that success, said, "Come, leave it all, follow me," would I have followed? Would I leave behind dreams that make my heart sing, to follow Jesus?

Luke tells us Peter did. When the nets were fuller than they had ever been before, almost breaking, Peter walked away. Day after day he had toiled under the sun and the rain, through wind and cold, working early and late for a far smaller catch. But on that day Jesus had come and borrowed the boat for a bit as he used the boat for his pulpit. And when Jesus had finished teaching the crowds, Jesus said to Peter, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

"Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they did they caught the fish. So many fish it took two boats to bring them in. So many fish the two boats were almost sinking.

So what did Peter do? Jump up and down? Cheer? High fives all around? No. He fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Peter knew he was in the presence of power that was not simply human. It is like all the reality he knew had been fractured and he was confronted with one whose power was from beyond this world - from God. Suddenly he was Moses at the burning bush - Isaiah in the heavenly temple - Israel watching the walls of Jericho crumble. God was in Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

And Peter and James and John left everything. All those valuable fish, and the nets and the boats and family and friends, they left everything and followed Jesus. They left a dream come true for Jesus.

Had all my basketball dreams come true, could I have walked away to follow Jesus? If all my wealth dreams would come true could I leave piles of money on the shore to follow dusty roads with Jesus? Could I let go of friends, even family for Jesus?

Could you?

I think I know the answer for me. The answer is no.

No. I cling to my pile of fish. I dole out a little for Jesus - ten percent of my income - sometimes a little more - time I can spare - time I can squeeze in around the edges of obligations to family and to my own leisure. But mostly I think of my life as being for me, for my happiness, serving those I love. No, I don't think I will be leaving everything for Jesus.

And if one of you tells me you are going to do that this week, I will be worried for you. What Peter did seems awfully unbalanced.

But not half as unbalanced as what Jesus did for Peter, for me, for you. Jesus who could fill the nets with fish, fill the crowds with a few fish and five loaves, Jesus who could still the storms, even walk on water, Jesus died in weakness, in agony, for you. Jesus gave up everything even life itself for you.

Jesus invites you to follow - even as he invited Peter and James and John. He offers himself as the dream for your life, for he knows that he is the only dream for your life that will not fail you.

And if you cannot let go of wealth and dreams and even family for him, he will be sad for he knows the heartache it will bring you. But he will love you still, offer himself to you. "My body given for you," he spoke to Peter who would deny him three times that night. "My blood shed for you," he would offer to James and John who would run in fear as Jesus was arrested.

Fish in a net caused Peter to fall down before Jesus. What will you do today when you encounter the one who gives everything for those who fail him?

Worship? Follow?