

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.

I heard it a lot when I was a kid. Maybe you did, too, or said it a lot as a parent: "Because I said so." When mom or dad told me to do something that didn't make sense, and I said, "But why?" often I'd hear, "Because I said so." It's a parent's way of avoiding a long explanation of why what they said is best. "I'm your parent, so if I tell you something, that's the way it's gonna be."

Did you notice that Jesus and Peter had a similar moment in that lesson I read for you? Only it wasn't Jesus saying, "Because I said so." It was Peter saying, "Because you say so."

They had just finished a fruitless night of fishing when their master showed up and asked to borrow their boat as a pulpit. When the sermon ended, Jesus said to Simon, "**Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.**" There's a command there: Put out...let down. But there's also a promise: There would be a catch. Neither made any sense to fishermen like Simon. They'd been out all night without one fish. Why would that change now? And they were out at night, in the shallows, because that's when and where fishing is best. Now Jesus tells him to cast the nets in the deep water, in the heat of the day?

Peter says, "Because you say so": "**Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.**" I wrestle with what was behind these words. Was it faith? "Jesus, this makes no sense. But because you say so, I'll trust you and I'll do it." I'm more inclined to think it was skepticism. "This makes no sense. If you say so, I'll do it, but I doubt anything will come of it."

The more important question is: What is it for us? Jesus has given us commands and promises, too, and they make about as little sense as day-time, deep-sea fishing in Galilee.

Jesus has told you it is more blessed, you are better off, when you are giving than when you are receiving. But that seems all backwards. And so...how often don't we give our offerings with all the skepticism of a Peter? "Because Jesus says so," I do it, but not all that convinced I'm more blessed with my money in the plate than in my pocket.

Jesus has told us that the best life is lived putting him first, everyone else second, and yourself last. How does that make sense – life is best when I'm on bottom? And so we help others, but on the inside we're holding back, always looking out for #1, too.

He has told you that, whatever your problem, you don't need to worry about it. Lay it at his feet in prayer, and he'll take care of it. But often our prayers go up with a, "If you say so, Lord...but I don't think this will do much good." Hedge our bets in our hearts, and continue worrying about whatever we prayed about.

So maybe we need to learn what the disciples learned that day. **When they [let down their nets], they caught such a large number of fish that [the 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.**

It made no sense. It seemed like horrible fishing advice. Except that *Jesus* was the one giving it. There shouldn't have been any fish there, yet their boats were near sinking with them. Because Jesus had said so. Isn't this a lesson Jesus wants us to learn with the disciples? Jesus' words never fail. No matter how little sense they make, they're true. No matter how unreasonable his promises, they are 100% trustworthy. Because the one who makes them does not lie. Just look at the fish! Jesus always keeps his word.

But the miracle didn't just drive home Jesus' faithfulness; it also drove home Peter's sinfulness. **When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"** Peter understood better than ever before that the man standing in the boat with him is his God. If he knew what was in the depths of the sea, he certainly knew about the sinful doubts in his heart and all the other dirt in his life. And it terrified him. It terrifies us when we realize the same, because we know what a holy God should do to us. "Go away, Lord," we say with Peter.

But Jesus doesn't do that. He didn't leave Peter; he did the opposite. He pulled Peter in even closer and said the most beautiful words in our lesson: "Peter, **don't be afraid.** Don't be afraid. I see all your sin, and I still love you and want you to be mine. The punishment you fear, I've come to take that away. The sins you have, I'll wash them clean and make you holy."

He says the same to you. He's done the same for you. His blood shed on the cross cleanses you from every sin. He suffered the punishment you fear in your place and took it away. You can be sure, because he said so when he had: "It is finished." He doesn't leave you, pulls you in close again this morning: "Your sins are forgiven." And then he does even more.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Come follow me, and **from now on you'll catch people.**" And they did. Think of it: They left their business, boats, the biggest catch ever on shore and went after him. Why? Because it was Jesus who said so. Because when you realize that Jesus loves you in spite of you, how sinful you were but how forgiven he's made you...how he even now wants to use you to share that news with others ...he means more to you than all the nets and boats in the world. When you realize his promises, like his love, never fail...there's no need to hold back or hedge your bets.

"Follow me, and **from now on you'll catch people.**" Because you say so, Jesus, gladly. Amen.