

I had everything lined up for today. Being Scout Sunday, a message about mutual respect would tie what we have been talking about in being Team God, Team Jesus, ONE with a shared vision, united in faith together with a core characteristic and value of scouting. I felt good, really good actually, about how things lined up. And then, wham! Sometimes it is a wham, or a bam, or a slam, or slap, or clap, or whap! It wasn't anything physical, but those spiritual and emotional “wake up” calls get your attention too. This past week felt like one of those weeks for me. Perhaps you have experienced something similar.

Peter certainly felt that way in our story. Did you hear him when he responded to Jesus in verse 5? “Master, we’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t caught even a minnow.”

Tired? You ever been tired? I’ve been tired.

Had enough? You ever had enough? I’ve had enough.

Can’t catch a break? You ever been at a point when you feel you can’t catch a break? Like you are at odds with nature or something. I’ve felt that way.

Discouraged? You ever been discouraged? I’ve been discouraged.

I am sure I have felt all this this week at some point.

Sometimes life feels like you are living in an aluminum can that is closing in all sides, doesn't it? Another phone call with challenging news... a friend opens up about an ongoing concern they have with a spouse... another test on a subject you have already struggled with... the budget is stressed and someone better figure how to fix it... I know we just completed the organ project and wow, how great is that, but hang on, wait, there seems to be something wrong with the tile and floor nearby so what could that be? It's standing water that has no place to escape and active termites.... You have been working day and night, maybe weeks, months, or even years, pouring your heart and soul into something only to feel like you have nothing to show for it... another family member has died... someone so competent and well one day is now suffering and facing imminent transition... and we haven't even talked about what we may know about our local hospital system, public school system, or world news... a seemingly lack of interest and empathy and genuine kindness from people, yet overbearing selfishness or self-righteousness... or maybe someone you love and admire and respect is going to move and for all the right reasons but it is still hard to swallow and imagine things without him, without her...

You know, maybe it is something simple, like being asked to do something for someone when all you want to do is be by yourself, or you are asked to help your brother or sister, or mentor a fellow scout, when all you want to do is focus on your thing. When we are asked to do something at the wrong time, we can feel discouraged that someone would have the audacity to ask. We think, “don’t they know?” Discouraged, frustrated, tired, done, too late?

Having one thing is one thing, but when they all begin to add up, or fall like a Jenga tower, that is something else entirely. Chances are we have all been there. Chances are, many of us here right now, are there. What next God? Why me? Don’t I get a break? What gives?

Here is what Scripture says: “The Lord goes before you and will be with you; the Lord will never leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” (Deut. 31:8, Joshua 1:9, 1 Chr. 28:20). God frequently encourages us not to be afraid, nor to be discouraged. And yet... we are afraid, we are discouraged anyway.

The story we just read in Luke 5 portrays an event of transformation for Peter and his fellow fishermen. They had headed out to do what they do, fish. It was their career, their lively hood, and they knew when to go and where to go. However, this night, which seemed like any other night, came with a wham, bam, slam, slap, clap, and whap. No fish. It wasn’t because they weren’t trying. They had been at it all night. It wasn’t because they didn’t have the right equipment. They had everything they needed before. No fish. And no fish meant no food, no money, and not only for them but the community and their families. Discouraged! Frustrated! Tired! Done! Too late! The sun was up, the prime time to fish was over.

I think it may be necessary to name the discouragement, kind of like naming our sin (as a sign of ownership), but as I tried to remind myself this past week, name it only to the point of recognizing that we can’t rest in it. A perpetual state of discouragement is no way to live.

So, then what? Just as you might suspect the fishing story to come to a close, because what else can Peter do, what else can Andrew, James, and John do? Enter Jesus. And when Jesus enters, of all things, Jesus asks Peter and the others to do the last thing any of them would want to do or even professionally recommend doing, and that is to get back in the boat and try again to fish. Discouraged? You bet! Frustrated? No doubt! Tired? Done? Peter’s response was clear, “We have worked all night and caught nothing.” You can feel Peter’s futility in his statement. “What I want is a meal and a bed, not a fishing trip. Am I your tour guide? Besides, half of Galilee is watching, and I feel like a loser already. And don’t you know you can’t catch fish in the morning. Count me out.” (Lucado, *Next Door Savior*, 37) And yet, when Jesus tells them to set out again, and this time to deep water, they are obedient to Jesus’ request.

And what happens when they have Jesus with them? More than they could ever think or do or imagine on their own. More fish than they could pull in. On their own, all night, their shallow spot near the shore = no fish. With Jesus, during daylight, the deep water = abundant fish.

This story isn't meant to mean anything other than just what you think it does. Life is better when we have Jesus. Home, Work, School, Sports, Hiking, Camping, Family, Friends, Church, you name it- better with Jesus.

Nearby this story in Luke is the story of Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. The root of the word for devil is *diablos* and it means to stir up, stir things around, cause trouble. The devil is known to feed on our discouragements. And life with the devil is not in our best interest. Therefore, we need a power with us able to defeat the devil! We need Jesus!

When we have Jesus... we have the heart to not give up. We may be discouraged but we are not forgotten. And because we know we are not forgotten, we are not left to wonder "Why me?" through life, only to trust God through life. Even when we turn our back and fall away, Christ is still there to help us get back on the trail. "Contrary to what we may feel or think at times, Jesus doesn't limit his recruiting and grace to the stout-hearted. The beat up and worn out are prime prospects for Jesus, and he's been known to climb into boats, bars, and *other places* (brothels) to say, "It's not too late to start over." (Lucado, Next Door Savior, 39)

Picture of Jesus reaching through the water to pull me out...

When we have Jesus... we have blessed assurance of God's blessed abundance. Yes, with a boat full of fish, or whatever that translates to materialistically, but more importantly with grace and purpose and peace and love. "The payload of his (Peter's) second effort was not the fish he caught but the God he saw." (Lucado, Next Door Savior, 40). When we have Jesus we are able to maintain focus on that which is good, that which is a blessing, and work to enjoy every ounce of it we can while we can. Right Cory? All that Jesus is and all Jesus symbolizes is really what we long for and that is really what gives us a foundation to stand on- a foundation that is rock and not sand. The materials will shift and move like sand, but Christ is the solid rock in which we are called to stand.

I've had a dollar to my name... I've had friends that walked away... And I've even lost myself a time or two... There were bridges crossed and burned... But through all the wreckage I have learned... There is one thing that I can never lose. If I got Jesus, I've got all that I could ever need... Take the world away from me And I'll be okay... If I got Jesus, there's a hope that's living deep inside... A joy that I could never hide... And a safe place to fall... If I got Jesus... I got it all.

"If I Got Jesus" by Ben Fuller