

A Catching Disease, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E5070204
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and Luke 5:1-11
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Fishing is a catching disease and can bite pretty badly. The avid fisher will go fishing at every opportunity: vacations and days off. They will even begin taking Fridays off during good weather. My wife and I know a couple who caught the fishing disease so badly, they bought a whole resort on a lake in Wisconsin. Now they can fish whenever they want to.

Stories abound of fishing disease. The wife of a good friend wondered why my friend hadn't come to bed yet. It was a cold February midnight in Syracuse, New York with snow on the ground. She looked all through the house, but couldn't find him. Finally, she opened the door to the garage, and there he was, sitting in his boat, playing with his fishing rod.

In sports shops, one can see the mock want ad from the newspaper: "Wanted with intention to marry: woman with boat and motor. Please send picture ... of boat." That is a disease: when a hobby or thing like a boat holds more value than a person.

There are all kinds of gimmicks for fishing now, including fish-finders. These are scopes connected to sonar that show where the fish are. A number of years ago, Maggie and I went fishing with my wife's brother, who owns a fishing resort on a lake in Wisconsin. It was early in the morning and we threw in our lines but didn't catch anything. Then, he turned on his fish finder, and we putted around until the fish finder indicated hundreds of fish below. Sure enough, we threw in the lines, and caught fish. That was our breakfast that day. I wonder if that doesn't take some of the sport out of fishing.

I wonder, too, what would have happened to Peter, James and John if they had a fish finder on Lake Galilee. They might not have become disciples. If fishing were that lucrative, they might not have dropped everything and followed Jesus. Actually, they did have a fish finder once. The name of the fish finder was Jesus.

The story goes, according to Luke, near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after he preached to the crowd from Peter's boat, he told him to get his crew to row out a little deeper and let their nets down for a catch. Peter complained they had worked all night long and caught nothing. We have heard and probably said something like that a number of times: "I tried that already, and it didn't work!"

At Jesus' suggestion, they did let their nets down. Perhaps they were so impressed with Jesus' teaching the crowds that they were willing to listen to his fishing suggestions. Because Jesus told them where to put their nets down, they were successful. They caught so many fish they needed help and their boat almost sank.

This is a miracle story about Jesus—something out of the ordinary. "Miracle" is the only way we can explain how Jesus knew where they would catch all those fish. We get a clue in Peter's response. Peter bent down at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful person!" He felt unworthy to be in the presence of one with such knowledge and power.

Peter knew he was in the presence of the divine. Only someone divine could direct this veteran fisherman to where that many fish were. So, Peter was humbled. I don't know why Peter was so surprised. He had already seen Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law.

The point of the story isn't Jesus' fish-finding ability, or about miracles. The great catch of fish allowed Jesus to say, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

This is the story of the call of Jesus' first disciples. The point is, Peter and James and John

were common folk, and Jesus called these common folk as his disciples. Jesus uses common folk, sinners, as his disciples. This is not unlike other calls from God for people to serve God. People are called in the midst of their regular activities: Moses while he was tending sheep; Gideon while threshing wheat. God calls people from their usual tasks and directs them to God's mission toward people.

Peter thought of himself as a sinner. This is not unlike Isaiah who said he was a man of unclean lips, or Paul who said he was untimely born and unfit to be called an apostle. Jesus said, "I have come to call not the righteous, but the sinners to repentance."¹

Jesus calls you and me to be his disciples and to do God's work. We have no excuses. Our jobs and our families are not excuses. Our unworthiness is not an excuse.

The word "disease" can mean sickness, like a cold or fishing disease, but it comes from the old English *dis-ease*, meaning lack of ease. I would like you all to catch a dis-ease— a disease about the lack of caring and compassion in the world. If you catch that disease, you will hear God's call to spread caring and compassion. I would like you to catch a dis-ease about Elon Community Church. We could have more members. The sanctuary could be full. There are many more people out there, perhaps a neighbor or a co-worker or relative who needs to hear of God's love, and who would benefit by being a part of this faith community. I would like you to catch a disease to catching others as they swim past you in life. Catch them and invite them into the Christian fold.

To be fishers of people is not to entrap or ensnare, but to minister to them- to care about and listen to them. Reach out in the name of God. Be dis-eased enough to catch others and invite them into the safety of the boat— the church. I want you to catch that catching disease so severely, you will spend days off and vacation days showing others that they are loved. You will say you are not worthy. God makes us worthy. We have no excuse.

We just commissioned Stephen Leaders. They will be looking for candidates who are willing to be trained for Stephen Ministry. Stephen Ministers are no more worthy than you are. Stephen Ministers are lay people who care about others and are willing to be trained to listen and respond in appropriate and helpful ways.

God can take us ordinary common folk and use us for God's purposes.

¹Luke 5:32