

Caught By God

Luke 5:1-11

Later today, and for the next few days, months, or maybe even years, we'll be talking about catches. ESPN's John Clayton claims that James Harrison's interception of Kurt Warner in Super Bowl 43 is the best play ever, resulting in the Steelers win that year. Others think about the Helmet Catch of David Tyree against the New England Patriots, or Lynn Swann's catch in Super Bowl X.

Those aren't the only catches we'll be talking about, though. We'll be talking about whether the referees caught all of the late hits on Peyton Manning by the Saints, or if the Colts offensive line is able to catch the blitzes. We'll watch to see which celebrities are caught in the stands watching, and which team Archie Manning is caught cheering for.

We'll also talk about what caught our eyes in the commercials. Every year, companies debut new advertising campaigns and spend millions of dollars to produce and show the ads. The ads try to catch the most people's attention. This year, the fact that Tim Tebow is appearing in a pro-life ad for Focus on the Family has pro-choice groups in an uproar, helping to make it one of the most anticipated commercials of the Super Bowl. Other commercials involving talking animals selling beer or car insurance. All of these commercials try to catch our attention, the buzz around the water-cooler for the next few days. Most importantly, they try to catch our brand loyalty and money. They want to catch our attention.

At first glance, it's that kind of catching that we see in today's Gospel reading, when Jesus calls the first disciples. He tells them that they will now catch men, fish for people. And catching people's attention requires hooks, lines or pictures or something that can get stuck in them. It requires personal magnetism, a clear message, advertising genius.

But that's not the kind of catching we see from the disciples. Their first reaction is that they've been caught. They've been caught in the presence of God, in the presence of great teaching and miraculous signs. They've been caught unprepared, in the midst of their everyday lives. Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch of fish isn't one of happiness or pride, or even

excitement that Jesus chose his boat to work from. It's one of unworthiness. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

That's the reaction when people are called by God. Isaiah, when he sees the vision of God surrounded by smoke and angels, responds, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Isaiah is caught up in the presence of God, and only sees his sin. Moses at the burning bush only sees his failings. When Jesus calls Matthew later in this chapter of Luke, he reacts by spending his ill-gotten gains to throw a party for Jesus, feeling his guilt. Being called by God is being caught by God.

The first part of being caught by God is recognizing your sinfulness, your uncleanness, your failings. But that's not where it ends. Being caught up by God doesn't just leave you condemned. Being a fish caught up in God's net doesn't just result in waiting to see if you're the next entrée at Red Lobster or Long John Silver's. In Isaiah's call story, an angel purifies his lips with a burning coal, takes away his sin, so that he can proclaim the word of the Lord. Peter, Andrew, James and John get caught up in following Jesus, led into a new life.

But the story doesn't end there. The call, being caught by God, is only the beginning. Just becoming fishers of men wasn't enough. As the disciples followed Jesus, they learned from his teachings and learned from his example. Jesus knew the truth of the old saying, that things are better caught than taught, and showed through all that He did what the disciples were to do.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that "[w]hen Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." Jesus showed his disciples that when He went to the cross to die for the sins of the whole world, for all the sinful people, all the people with unclean lips, everyone. And after He rose on Easter morning, Jesus went and found His disciples, who were back fishing for fish. He called them again, caught them again, and sent them out again, to catch people for God.

We, too, have been called and caught by God. Drawn through water at Baptism, we are called to catch people, too. Some churches look for a way to "catch" people, bringing them into the church through other activities

first. When I first came to Ames, I was interviewed by the Iowa State Daily about churches having Halo parties to attract teenagers to church. This past week, the New York Times had an article about churches that are using mixed martial arts to attract young men, a demographic missing from most churches. It can be tempting to chase after the newest fad to catch people for God. In the long run, though, it takes time

Catching people for God, like fishing, can be long, tedious, and frustrating. Peter, Andrew, James and John had fished all night, and had nothing for their troubles. Last weekend, I went ice fishing with a couple of guys from church. We had the right bait, the right equipment. The depth finder even showed fish swimming around under the ice where we had drilled holes. But after several hours of fishing, all we had to show for our troubles were a few drowned wax worms, a few holes in the ice, and cold fingers and toes.

Catching people can be the same way. Stories abound of missionaries working for years with little to show for their work. Pastor Bob Newton's first assignment out of seminary was to be a missionary in the Philippines, and two years later, the tribe was still sacrificing pigs to placate ancestral spirits. Missionaries have been present in Japan since the 1600's, but the country is still only 1% Christian. Catching people for God can also be tedious and frustrating.

God doesn't usually catch people like with the apostle Paul, who's blinded by the light and has a dramatic, drastic change of heart. God works in the slow, steady way of calling people where they are, and using those talents. God called Peter, Andrew, James and John and turned their fishing for fish into fishing for people, using the same work ethic they had as fishermen to prepare them for the long, hard work of being disciples and discipling others.

Saturday morning I drove down to Des Moines to see two of my friends from junior high perform at a church-related youth event. They played drums together all through high school. During one orchestra retreat where they were bored, they came up with an act for the talent show called the Bucket Boys. Over a decade later, they still play state fairs and schools, churches and car shows and everything in-between, creating music by banging on buckets, pots, and street signs. They use this not only as a part-time music gig or an excuse to travel to

India, but a chance to teach people of all ages about rhythm, music, character and faith. God's used their talents to share the Good News with others. If you look around the congregation, you can many gifts used in many and various ways.

God continues to catch us. Sometimes, it's to be caught in our sin and see our need for a Savior. Other times, God catches us when we fall, are lonely or afraid, bringing us out of the depths into the light. And God uses us to catch others. The catches may not make Sports Center, but that doesn't make them any less miraculous or impressive.

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