

# “Peter’s Boat Story”

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## Luke 5:1-11 (GNT)

<sup>1</sup> One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. <sup>2</sup> He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. <sup>3</sup> Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

<sup>4</sup> When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

<sup>5</sup> “Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. <sup>7</sup> So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. <sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

<sup>9</sup> He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. <sup>10</sup> The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, “Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

<sup>11</sup> They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

I haven't seen her in a while, that boat. The Rock, we called her. I know, as a name for a boat, “The Rock” doesn't exactly inspire confidence. But my father built it just before he died, and he named it after my nickname, Rocky. Oh, my real name is Simon Peter.

My father and I fished with this boat for nearly a year before... well, before I had to take over the fishing business myself. Haven't seen my boat in... let's see... three years with Jesus, and a year since—I guess it's going on four years now. I walked away from her one day—never thought I'd do *that!* Walked away from my boat, my nets, my business, my hometown. A few friends came with me that day, but not many.

It was when Jesus had come into town. He hailed from Nazareth on the other side of the mountain about a day's journey from here. We'd heard about him for several weeks. Travelers would tell us about hearing him teach. Quite a storyteller, they'd say. He made you hear holy scripture as if God in the flesh were speaking to you, they'd say. So I'll admit I was a little excited to hear that he was heading toward Capernaum, and then to hear that he was in town, and then to see him come down here to the lakeshore where I was working.

Many of the townsfolk came out to hear him speak. Mind you, Jesus already had quite a following when he entered the village--people who couldn't get enough of what

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my sermon “Peter Remembers His Boat” originally preached February 4, 2001.

he had to say. So he came down here to the beach that day; must have been around midday. Fishing was done for the day – what fishing we had been able to do overnight. It had been one of those nights of fishing when you started to believe that fish slept at night, too, because they certainly weren't biting. So we had come in a little earlier than usual, and were sitting in the shade right over there – you know, washing the weeds and mud out of the nets, fixing tears, hanging the nets out to dry.

That when Jimmy or Johnny – I forget which – one of them said to me, “Rocky, look. That Jesus fellow's getting in your boat. Were you supposed to take him somewhere?”

“No.” I'll admit that I was surprised that he just climbed in, but he didn't seem intent on disturbing anything so I was just going to sit and watch – you know, see what happened next.

But then Jesus looked right at me – mind you, we hadn't met, but maybe somebody had pointed me out to him when I wasn't looking. Jesus called out, “Brother Simon Peter. How about pushing me away from shore just a tad so people can see and hear me?”

I made my way through the crowd, picked up the bow and walked the boat about ten feet from shore, dropping the anchor in the knee-deep water.

I don't know how long he talked. Jimmy and Johnny and I – we listened as we finished working on the nets. The next thing I know – maybe an hour later, maybe longer – Jesus called to me again.

“Brother Simon Peter. Get your crew, get your nets. Let's go fishing.”

“Sir, we tried all night long and caught almost nothing. It's just not happening today.” But I remember that, as I spoke, I had already gathered up the net and my tunic and was making my way toward the water. Jimmy and Johnny soon followed me. As I approached the water I said to Jesus, “But sir, if you say so, I'll try it again.”

So we waded out to the boat, tossed our equipment aboard and pulled ourselves in.

I hoisted the sail and we went out a ways. I kept an eye on Jesus. I didn't know for sure if he had a particular spot in mind. When we reached the deeper water Jesus looked at me, smiled and nodded. We dropped sail, flung the nets across the water, and began to pull.

At first I thought we'd snagged something submerged, but no, we were in the deeper part of the lake. We pulled those nets and could feel them begin to come to life, as though they were trying to swim away from us. And then as we got to the midpoint of the net it began to bring up the fish. So many fish! I remember thinking, this must be every single fish in the lake! There were so many they looked like and felt like a rock pile of fish. Some of our buddies had decided to follow us out, and we motioned for them to come alongside and help us bring in the net, because we could barely begin to

pull it out of the water. We started loading the fish into our boat. Our buddies came alongside and they began to load the fish into their boat, too. Both boats were filled with more fish than I had ever seen in all my years, and the net was still full.

And that's when I realized what miracle was unfolding in front of my eyes.

Back on the beach I had been ready to tell Jesus to get out of my boat – but I didn't. I had been ready to tell Jesus – a stranger from the farming country of inland Galilee, “You know what, *you* stick to the land, and leave fishing to the real fishermen.” I had thought about saying that to him – but I didn't. For once in my life I didn't say what I was thinking. You see, the thing is, I thought I knew what I needed to manage my life. I knew I didn't need anything from some outsider.

But Jesus had been talking about trusting God so that God can direct your life. And now here he was, directing me, and Jimmy and Johnny, and our friends – directing us to the most plentiful catch of fish any of us had ever heard of, much less seen with our own eyes.

That's when I realized that what Jesus had been talking about back on the shore, Jesus had been saying for my benefit: that God's plan for my life is more plentiful, richer, more surprising than any plans I could possibly concoct or engineer or manipulate on my own.

I remember letting go of my part of the net, falling to my knees and hugging Jesus and saying, “I don't deserve you, Master, for I'm just a man – a selfish, occasionally dishonest, sinful man. Don't let me spoil what you have to offer good people!”

Jesus grasped me by the arms, pulled me up. “Don't be afraid to trust God in every part of your daily life, Brother Simon Peter. Now you can catch bigger fish than these: you'll be pulling in people like yourself so they can give their lives, too, to serve God.”

That's when Jimmy and Johnny and I left these boats right here on the shore, and headed down the road with Jesus. That day my life became more valuable to me because I wasn't looking out for just me anymore. To my surprise, I found new joy, excitement, a sense of purpose, and a certain peace in my life because I was more focused on God my maker. And Jesus helped me discover that. I saw God in a new way because of Jesus--as though I was looking at God in the flesh.

Who knows? Maybe someday Jesus will show up where you work, where you study, where you live, and he'll call your name like he called mine.