

**Title:** The Confounding Christ

**Text:** Luke 5:1-11

**Theme:** To follow Jesus is to embark on journey with the One who is an equal mixture of fear and fascination.

What a joy it is to be with you this weekend and catch the overflow of the passion I see to fulfill the mission that Jesus has given to His church. It is rare that I see such passion from the top down to stay focused on this mission of discipling. You are all in. Frankly, it is only if you are all in with the ministry staff and elders leading the way elder you will transformed disciple-making community. I listened to Ben's sermon series on your mission statement and heard his heart, and then to see how you have responded as a community to participate in becoming replicators of the life of Jesus in others. I commend you. It does my heart good.

But I will start this message as I started the seminar yesterday saying that even as a pastor I was a little slow in comprehending what we are to be all about. I call it my "duh" moment. We have all had those. A "dub" moment is a truth that is right there before you but you don't see it. And when you do, you say "dub". How obvious was that.

My "duh" moment came as I was pastoring an independent church in Saratago. It was the early 1990's. Writing mission statements seemed to be the craze of the day. Stephen Covey had published his best seller, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. One of the things he says is that effective people have a clear mission and they measure everything they do everyday against this mission. At this same time, perhaps instigated by Covey, business books were highlighting the need to know exactly what business they were in. Many even displayed their mission statements publicly, such as Starbucks. Starbucks mission reads: *to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.*

This craze for mission statements captured the church as well. So we thought SFC should have a mission statement. A subgroup of elders “volunteered” to work with me to draft such as statement. Truly this was the blind leading the blind. We thought it important, but really had very little idea of what a mission statement should look like when we were done. We wrote draft after draft. We used so much paper that it seemed that much of Santa Cruz Mountains had been deforested. Each draft placed before the Council of elders was received without much enthusiasm. Finally, I think it was two years later, the Council of Elders approved a version out of sheer exhaustion. Enough already, they were saying! Sometime after that I had my “duh” moment. You know what those are. A “duh” moment is when the obvious finally hits you right between the eyes.

After all this work, I suddenly realized that Jesus had done all the work for us. He gave us our marching orders when he told his disciples, **“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).** Once this bored in on me, it was as if Jesus said to me, **“Keep a laser focus on this mission. Don’t take your eyes off of it. And do what you can to get the church focused on *making disciples of Jesus* as the main thing.”**

So what is a disciple. A disciple or follower is simply one who is the student. To put this in the language of learning a trade, disciples are apprentices, who model themselves after the one who is the master teacher.

So here is my question for the morning. How does an apprentice keep this relationship with Jesus alive? What will induce us to continue to follow him?

If we are to call others to follow him, we must ourselves first be captivated by the person and power of Jesus Christ as a lifelong allure.

John Ortberg puts it like this, **“No one can be a disciple of Jesus because they think they should; you actually have to want it.”**

If the message we communicate to others is that we follow Jesus out of some dreary obedience, who is going to want that? Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago area, is fond of saying that anytime we invite people to consider the claims of Christ upon their lives we are asking them to either trade up or trade down. By that he meant, that as people scrutinize our lives and the Christ we claim to follow, they are either going to see in us something that will be a step up or a step down. That is a sobering thought. Am I getting a better or worse deal than the one I have by looking at your life.

**“No one can be a disciple of Jesus because they think they should; you actually have to want it.”**

**So, the question is: What is it that creates the “want to”?**

What is it that makes Jesus so compelling that we are willing to turn aside from every other claim upon our life and set our course to walk in his steps?

For you see a relationship with Jesus, I believe, should come with equal amounts of **fear and fascination**. Can't live with Him; can't live without Him. As much as He affirms us, He disturbs us. As much as He gives us a singular focus, He complicates our decisions. His yoke is easy; but his way is hard. **He is the confounding Christ**. At the same time we are drawn magnetically to the irresistible Jesus, we find ourselves pushing him away because He shows us things about ourselves that are simply too uncomfortable to see.

Let's turn our attention to a story recorded in Luke 5:1-11 where this push and pull of discipleship is illustrated dramatically in Peter and his companions' encounter with Christ. We will see how Jesus orchestrates the events in order to unnerve these mere mortals with his display of other worldly power. Jesus enters the turf of these fishermen (Peter, James and John) and upsets their comfortable, predictable existence.

## Read Luke 5:1-11

The backdrop against which Jesus unveils his identity can be quickly painted. Masses of people have converged on the shore of Lake Gennesaret (also known the Sea of Galilee) to hear Jesus' message. The sheer physical press of the crowd forces Jesus to borrow Peter's boat which He turns into a floating pulpit.

Upon completion of his teaching, Jesus proceeds to set Peter up with the command, "Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Peter responds to this request with an **exasperation born of exhaustion. He does not hide his irritation.** "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything" (Luke 5:5). The Message: "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't even caught a minnow." In addition to Peter's sheer tiredness, you get the impression that Peter thinks Jesus is just out of his element. Peter is a fisherman, who comes from a long line of fishermen. This was his profession. Jesus shows his ignorance of fishing by his request, "Put out into deep water..." Deep waters are for night fishing and are known to be unsuccessful during daylight. Why do you think Peter and his companions have been fishing all night? Because fishermen know that is when the time was right. The fish couldn't see the nets. Peter perhaps was thinking, "Jesus, you stick to preaching, and let us handle the fishing."

Yet out of sheer reverence for the "Master", Peter accedes to the request. "But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5b). Peter has sufficient respect to acquiesce, but he seems to have no expectation of success. Yet no sooner had the nets been lowered into the sea than it seemed that every fish within miles had decided their time had come. Peter signaled for his partners to join him in order to land this catch, and yet even with two boats the size of the haul threatened to sink them both.

Our interest here is Peter's reaction to the catch of fish, the likes of which he had never seen nor heard. If Peter had been selfishly focused solely on the financial success of this venture, he might have consulted a lawyer, drawn up a contract and tried to sign

Jesus on as a full partner. Yet financial gain is nowhere to be found in Peter's consciousness.

This Jesus who confounds Peter is **simultaneously disturbing and attractive**. "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man'" (Luke 5:8). The Message: "Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself." Peter is a conflicted man, experiencing what psychologists would label as "cognitive dissonance". Peter's words and actions collide. His life was a head on train wreck.

On the one hand, Peter appears to be **magnetically drawn to Jesus**. One can visualize Peter high stepping it through the waters, running toward this man who commands the seas to obey him. Peter falls on his knees at the feet of Jesus in an act of worship. He is drawn toward life. He never felt more vital than his did at that moment.

Yet at the same time, Peter intuitively knows he is in the presence of no mere mortal. He is experiencing an excruciatingly painful exposure. "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." "Master, I am a sinner and can't handle this holiness." I don't deserve to be in your presence, Peter is saying. Leave me, for I can't seem to leave you.

**I would submit that this push-pull, revulsion-attraction dynamic is the lifelong fascination that keeps us ever alive and under the formative power of Jesus Christ.** This is why Jesus is like none other and is so compelling.

Let's look more closely at what is going on with Peter.

### **1. Peter is repelled by the presence of the Holy One of God.**

What was Peter experiencing when he said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man"? or "I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness." Peter had no category of human understanding in which to

classify the person of Jesus Christ. He instinctively knew that **this was no mere man**. Somehow in a way that his mind would never be able to explain, the Holy One of Israel had embodied Himself in the person of Jesus. The **normally hidden glory of God** had for that moment been unveiled through a person and Peter was overwhelmed.

To experience the holiness of God is to come face to face with **"overpoweringness"**. Forces had been unleashed over which he had no control and they threatened to undo him.

Like Peter, the prophet Isaiah was profoundly overwhelmed when he had an epiphany of God. At the time of the death of a human sovereign Isaiah was caught off guard by the inbreaking of the Sovereign. Isaiah entered the temple and experienced an epiphany, the appearance of the Lord. **"In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted and the train of his robe filed the temple."** Uzziah reigned in the Southern Kingdom of Judah for just over 50 years as one of generally good Kings in the first half of 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. His death would have had a profound sense of loss and great disturbance in Israel. It is at this time the King makes himself known to Isaiah. He has a vision of the Lord on his throne, separated, lifted up and over him, so that he is dwarfed by the sheer size. The train of his regal gown wafts through the temple. See a royal wedding and the train of the bride completely filling the center aisle. Then these strange six-winged creatures called seraphs appear, angelic beings that surround the throne of God. **[slide 6 part 2] "Above him were seraphs, each with 6 wings: With two wings they covered their faces [the sheer brilliance of God was even too much for them], with two they covered their feet [their shame], and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is fully of his glory.'"**

With the presence of holiness came an impact on the physical surroundings that must have terrified Isaiah. **"At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke" (Is. 6:4) Have you been in the presence of a power**

**over which you had no control that threatened to consume you?** My wife and I have lived in California most of our lives and therefore we are regular survivors of earthquakes. The most fearsome earthquake certainly for us occurred on Oct. 17, 1989 at 5:04PM. This was the San Francisco Bay earthquake. I was pastoring a church about 10 miles from the epicenter and my wife was the principal of a nearby elementary school. This was 15 seconds that shook the world, certainly our world. I had just convened a rather tense meeting in my office at 5PM when the earthquake hit. We dove for cover under the extended lip of my desk. Even though it was short we knew it was powerful. The meeting was over. We knew we have been in the midst of a power that we have no capacity to control. The earth had moved. A building could come down upon us. For Isaiah the presence of a holy God has been experienced in the thresholds of the temple shifting. What was to keep it up?

Like Isaiah, Peter is overpowered. It is this “overpoweringness”, the holiness of God that produced a sense of his moral corruption. the presence of the One who is Holy, his response is to see himself for what He is. **“Woe is me!”** I cried. (Oy vey ist mere) **I am ruined!** (Dis-integrating, coming apart at the seams, can’t hold it together) **For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”** But why this reaction? Why would Isaiah and Peter’s focus be on their inner taintedness?

Pressed in upon Peter was the presence of the Holy. The word ***holy* means “to cut or separate.”** This is an ancient form of our modern terminology “to be a cut above.” In theological language we call this **“transcendence”, which means to exceed the usual limits.** Jesus is the one who exceeds the usual limits, the cut above, the standard by which everything else is measured.

Up to this point, Peter was like most human beings, morally adrift and generally easy on themselves. We tend to grade our moral quality on a curve, not against an absolute scale. Sure we have our little foibles, bad habits, but doesn’t everyone. We might say,

certainly I am no saint, but I am generally a good sort of person. We make the assumption that God has the same complacency about our shortcomings, as we do.

Let's go back to our days in school: Who is the most hated person in the classroom? Remember those impossible exams while you were in high school or college. You walked out of the exam saying, what did this have to do with anything we studied? It wasn't in my lecture notes. I couldn't find those answers in the textbook. The only hope I have is that we all did equally bad and the professor grades on the curve. You are relieved to find out that this is exactly what the professor is going to do. So perhaps my 40% will squeak by after all. Then you hear the curve has been skewed, there was some brainiac who scored a 100% on that exam. Do you think the day that the graded exams were passed back that the class rose up and gave a resounding round of applause to the curve breaker? No, you sat there is resentment, knowing that for someone this test was conquerable. They set the standard.

For Peter his scale of measurement had been obliterated in a matter of moments. All of his fuzzyheaded, self-justification now made no difference. He stood in the presence of absolute holiness. Jesus Christ was the curve breaker. Peter saw himself for the first time from the vantage point of the holiness of God.

Peter stood exposed. Most of us have the opportunity to minimize the pain of our sin because the revealing light of God's holiness exposes our darkness a bit at a time. But Peter went from the pitch black of a cave to the piercing brilliance of an afternoon sun. He wanted to push Jesus away; the psychic throb was too great.

**And yet discipleship means to place ourselves under the gaze of God and to allow Him to expose our personal darkness.**

Oswald Chambers put the experience of Jesus like this, "If we have never had the experience of taking our commonplace religious shoes off of our common place religious feet, and getting rid of all



the undue familiarity with which we approach God, it is questionable whether we have ever stood in His presence. The people who are flippant and familiar are those who have never been introduced to Jesus Christ.”

Peter has been so introduced.

On the one hand, Peter experienced Jesus as a disturbing, troubling, convicting purity who could see straight through to the depths of his soul. There was nothing he could hide. “Depart from me...”

And yet at the same time...

## **2. Peter is magnetically drawn to life-giving Jesus.**

The other half of the story is that to be around Jesus is to be in the presence of one who is life itself. At the same time Peter was pleading for Jesus to leave, he was on his knees worshipping him. I envision Peter clutching onto Jesus’ robe as if he is restraining his departure. As painful as this moment was, Peter did not want to be anywhere else. What a rush! He was a perfect mixture of fear and fascination. Isn’t this similar to the powerful personalities we have encountered in life? They can be painfully irritating but they are so colorful that simply being around them makes you feel more alive.

Jesus had charisma. On the day when Peter’s business had never been more successful, Jesus calls him away to follow him. The Scripture captures Peter and the others response, “For he and all his companions were *astonished* at the catch of fish they had taken, 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 catch men.’ So they pulled their boats on shore, left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:9-11).

There was such a compelling force, captivating aura about the person of Jesus that simply being associated with him was worth the

loss of security. Peter now felt more alive around Jesus, than anyone he ever had or certainly would encounter.

After one of the hard teachings of Jesus, many who had followed him to that point began to fall away. The disciples themselves were saying, **"This is a hard teaching, who can accept it"** (John 6:60)? Seeing many fall away, Jesus turned to his disciples, **"Do you not want to leave too?"** (John 6:67)? Who was it that spoke up for the twelve? Peter is heard to say, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"** (John 6:68, 69).

Part of the power of the draw of Jesus was his audacity to ask for a total commitment of their lives. Written into our hearts is the desire to find something worthy of the devotion of our entire energies. Jesus is so worth giving ourselves to that it will require the **full development of our minds, the complete harnessing of our emotions, and the total discipline of our wills.**

Jesus called Peter and his fellow fishermen to a different kind of fishing business. **"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men"** (Luke 5:10). Jesus was now giving them the opportunity to "catch alive" people and see the Lord redirect lives toward the God who was making Himself known in the person of Jesus.

**None other than God in human form was enlisting them in service of the greatest enterprise on earth.**

J. I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* captures wonderfully the dignifying nature of this call. He tells us to imagine that we are given the opportunity of a lifetime to meet the one we would consider the pinnacle—**the cut above either in rank, intellectual power, professional skill, or personal sanctity.** It could be someone who has set the standard in your profession. It could be someone you admire for his or her moral integrity or sacrifice for a cause. Pause and think about who that person might be for you. For me, the people who have paid a price for their beliefs would be the ones I would be privileged to meet. If I could have an hour alone with

Nelson Mandela, or historical heroes like Martin Luther King or William Wilberforce, that would just about be it for me. If President Obama sought an audience with me, Wow! So visualize for yourself having a private audience with this one whom you would consider a lifetime honor to meet. The more you are consciously aware of your "inferiority", the more you realize it is not your place to initiate or dictate the conversation, you would allow it to be directed by this "exalted" person. If this figure kept the conversation on the level of courteous pleasantries, you might be disappointed, but you certainly couldn't complain. You would still be able to have bragging rights about the time that you conversed with \_\_\_\_\_. But what if this person began to confide in you their deepest thoughts and concerns? In fact, they went beyond that and began to invite you to share in some particular undertaking they had planned; and asked if you might be available whenever they needed you. All of a sudden you find your head lifting, and chest swelling, and you feel alive like never before. Meaning and value have put zest into your step. You are a personal assistant to this great figure.

God chooses earthen vessels to accomplish his purpose. I have often questioned the wisdom of God's decision to use the likes of you and me to carry out the greatest enterprise on earth: God comes to us with a call as he did to Peter and his fellow fishermen, "Here's job I'd like to be done and you are the one to do it." Were Peter and his cohorts up to the job? Of course not. But Jesus said, "I will make you fishers of men."

One person put this sense of call in this challenging fashion: "The possibilities in my life and in yours are not fixed by what we suppose our abilities to be...What I can do and what I must do are determined by a call that comes to me from outside myself. In other words, we should not assess our abilities and inclinations and ask, "What am I suited to do for God?" No, God comes to each one with a demand that requires a response, "Here is a job to be done...and I have chosen you to do it."

We are the most unlikely people to carry out God's purposes, but that is his approach. He puts his life in earthen vessels, or as I like to say cracked pots.

Let me tell you about one of those "cracked pots". Gordon is a 78 year-old single man. He has never been married. He has never had a wife to dress him and make sure that he is properly put together before he goes out into public. When I see him, I wonder if he had looked in the mirror before going outside. He has an orange plaid shirt matched with yellow plaid pants. He looks like he shaved with a weed-whacker. He has stubble and growth all in the wrong places. You would never know from looking at Gordon that he has spent over 60 years of his life in youth ministry and the last half of that working with incarcerated youth in the juvenile justice system. Gordon has young, mostly African American teenagers in toe, which the Lord has rescued from a 17-week boot camp for offenders who otherwise would be doing hard time in jail. Many of these youth have committed their lives to Jesus Christ and are on track to follow him and escape their neighborhoods. If you put Gordon in a line-up of potential youth workers he is the last one you would choose. But what does Gordon say of his work, "God has given me a front row seat to miracles." Gordon is an instrument through which these miracles come. Transformed lives. Yes, God does use "cracked pots" to accomplish his purposes.

Some of you may recall the classic cult movie *The Blues Brothers*. The late John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd played a couple of ex-convicts-wanna-be-musicians who were trying to raise money for an orphanage. Anytime they were asked about their work, they had a standard response: "We're on a mission from God." They always said it as if they believed it. The very idea that two inept, unworthy human beings were on a mission from God was the central joke of the story. Isn't that the point: God you have to be joking? You have a call on my life. I have a job to be done, and you are the one to do. See how our dignity lifts in the presence of this call.

This is the way Os Guinness puts the hunger for God's purpose in his book, *The Call*. "Deep in our hearts, we all want to find and

*fulfill a purpose bigger than ourselves. Only such a larger purpose can inspire us to heights we know we could never reach on our own. For each of us the real purpose is personal and passionate: to know what we are here to do, and why. Kierkegaard (the Danish philosopher) wrote in his journal: "The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."*

What is that call or purpose for you? Why has Jesus made a claim on our life and called us to follow him? What does he have for you to do? For all of us, it is certainly the mission of introducing people to the most compelling figure the world has known or ever will know. This same figure makes our lives compelling for we are called to live for something bigger than ourselves. *We are on a mission from God.* What is that for you?

Each one of us has our own particular call. I wish I had time to spell out the contours of what that might look like. Just to say that we all have been given particular gifts and passions, with unique design. I like to say that *"much of the will of God for us has been written into us."* In other words, God has given you a personality, things you care about, needs to which you are drawn, hurts that get under your skin. Pay attention to those, because that is an indication of your call. My call is to awaken the church to its disciple-making mission, to call us back to first things, and to teach an approach to disciple-making through small, reproducible groups of transformation. The older I get the more I realize that the sand is slipping from the hour-glass. There is a sense of urgency. Stay focused on this call. Make sure you finish well and don't get distracted, because this call is what I will be held accountable for. For what will you have to give account to God when you stand before him and He asks us what you did with what He gave you?

It has been said, *"There are two holes in our heart. The first hole in our heart is to know God."* Peter had a full on encounter with this God. But *"then there is a second hole in our heart which is to fulfill God's call."*

This truth is captured by a story told of Rabbi Zusya. Rabbi Zusya embodied for his students a man who loved God with all his heart and soul, and demonstrated this in his generous life. One day Rabbi Zusya did not show up to his House of Study. Finally, the worried students rushed to his house that evening to find the Rabbi in a very weakened state. His students cried out, "Rabbi Zusya, What has happened? How can we help you?" The Rabbi replied, "There is nothing you can do. I'm dying and I am very frightened." The students were shocked that the Rabbi was frightened. "Did you not teach us that all living things die?" Yes, the Rabbi affirmed what they had learned. The students were confused, "Then why are you afraid? You have led such a good life. You have believed in God with a faith as strong as Abraham's and you have followed the commandments as carefully as Moses." The rabbi explained, "Thank you. But this is not why I am afraid. For if God should ask me why I did not act like Abraham, I can say that I was not Abraham. And if God asks me why I did not act like Moses, I can also say that I was not Moses. But if God should ask me to account for the times when I did not act like Zusya, what shall I say then?"<sup>1</sup>

Peter and his companions were called to be apostles who were to catch people. They were called to carry out the work of the King of the Universe who had traveled from eternity to time to establish his kingdom of earth. They were being asked to be on the ground floor. His life had become their life.

So how do we put the push and pull of discipleship together? On the one hand, when Peter encounters Jesus He is stripped down to the core. He writhes in pain over the state of his heart. Holiness exposes. All pretence about his pretended goodness vanishes in an instant.

Then, it is as if Jesus says. Now I have you right where I want you. Now you are useful to me. Now that you have seen your feet of clay, you will allow me to mold you into the person I intend you to be. Now I can lift you, elevate you, and call you into service. Take all

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<sup>1</sup> Gila Gevirtz, *Partners with God*. (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1995), ?

of who I have designed you to be and make yourself available, because I intend to accomplish my purposes through you.

Jesus is compelling and confounding because he is ever interesting, infuriating, engaging, troubling, challenging, but I assure you never dull. **"No one can be a disciple of Jesus, because they think they should; you actually have to want it."** Do you want it? Really? Because if you don't want it, then you want something else, and that something else is what you are truly living for. Do you want others to have the life you are living?