

Pastor Fritz Wiese & Sara Cutter, Tag Team Sermon  
Superbowl Sunday. "A Hail Mary Fishing Story"  
7 February 2010, Luke 5.1-11

**Fritz:** At our new disciple class, I tell the following story: A couple of years ago, our staff decided to go out for a team-building fun day. We decided to try something new: ice fishing. We borrowed a bunch of equipment and found what we thought was a terrific setting. Jane Lane took out the auger and started to drill a hole when we heard a voice, "Please stop drilling. There are no fish below the ice." We looked around, but didn't see anybody! So after a moment, Jane Lane started to drill again. And again, a booming voice was heard: "Please stop. There are absolutely no fish below the surface of the ice." We looked up, didn't see anyone, and came to the only logical conclusion: "Lord is that you?" Then we heard, "No. This is the rink manager. There are no fish below the ice."

In our gospel today, we hear the time when the disciples were fishing in the wrong spot for the catch. And a lot of times, we're the same way. We look in the wrong directions for fulfillment. But the disciples learn that in Jesus, there is someone who knows not only the waters of Galilee, but the waters of life. In Jesus, they have someone they can trust to lead them to a bountiful catch, and invites them on an incredible adventure.

Today, millions of people will watch two teams who have been on an incredible adventure all year. And if the players of the disciples, they are trusting in a coaching staff who hopefully knows the ins and outs of the game as well as Jesus did. Originally Dan Mershon was to preach today, but due to the ski trip, couldn't be here. So I asked Pastor Sara if she'd like to tag team with me today. We thought we'd have some fun exploring if today's big game might be an entre into thinking about the faith. Is faith both offense and defense? What does it mean to be a part of a team? Can the coach be trusted?

So here is Pastor Sara, with the "defensive side" of the ball. . . .

**Sara:** *Everybody knows that the best offense is a good defense. We have to cover our bases, study our opponents, be able to look for their best plays and counteract them with an amazing defense. To*

*play the game well our defense has to be on target from start to finish. For the game later today, the Colts will have to shut down Drew Brees and Pierre Thomas. The Saints will have to watch out for Peyton Manning, I think. Does he still play for the Colts? The defensive players will have to rise to the occasion and stop their opponents in order to make space for their teammates to make progress and move down the field.*

*The trick for the defense is knowing how to read the play. How to out maneuver the running game, how to read the quarterback's throwing game. Where to block, when to run down the field, how to react to your opponents. Things that seem fairly mundane. Planning, practicing and preparing aren't nearly as exciting as those in the game moments. But often times that's where the hard work is done. Where the coaches run drills, get the team prepared, teach their players and turn individuals into a team. That's the hard part that takes time, energy, dedication to one another and commitment to a goal. There is a tension in the defense, you have to plan and prepare but then be able to react in an instant and act as a unit trusting your teammates.*

*To make this happen, coaches and teams spend hours working together, running drills, and getting to know one another. But before they become a well-oiled machine, they are brought together. Teams draft players and hire coaches with the hopes that through their hard work and relationships, they can put W's in the win column. In the gospel lesson Pastor Fritz read a few minutes ago, we get a glimpse at the beginning of a very different way that one team came together. This one wasn't formed to get a W, but for something else. (Fritz: I'm trying to set you up here for the end with folks coming together.) In the NFL, the draft is a highly anticipated event. The players participate in combines. They submit themselves to grueling workouts and are studied by various scouts who rank their abilities. But those first disciples in Luke's account were in the middle of much more mundane tasks. They were more like practicing their drills then preparing for the end of the game Hail Mary pass.*

*Here they are at the edge of the lake wrapping things up for the evening. They had not had a successful day. You can almost imagine them with their heads hanging down as they rinse out their*

*under-used nets. They've lost the game. The fish have stayed away from their nets. They have failed in their tasks. Then Jesus shows up. Now Peter, or Simon as he is referred to here, he knows Jesus. Jesus had recently helped his mother-in-law out, but I think it's fair to say they weren't on the same team yet. So, Jesus shows up, sees these fishermen cleaning up for the day and tells them to push away from the shore. Maybe there's a little tension going on here, too. The boats and nets were made for fishing. Jesus wants to use their equipment to teach the crowds. Maybe he needed a little protection; maybe he thought he could make these guys feel useful. I'm not sure. So they push out into the water a little ways and Jesus makes himself at home and starts teaching those crowds of people that had gathered to hear the word of God.*

*Once he had finished, Jesus says to Peter, go a little deeper. Peter initially declines the invitation. And who can blame him? They had been fishing all day with nothing to show for it and everyone know that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. But, something in Peter causes him to trust Jesus enough to give it a shot. After all, Jesus can see the whole picture, right? Jesus is like the coach sitting up near the press box. He can see all the plays, point out the weaknesses of the other team, and keep them moving forward. Go deeper, Jesus says. You're making the right plays, just in the wrong place. And you all know what happened then. So many fish jumped into their nets that they had to call in the second string for backup.*

*What a great problem to have and what an unexpected outcome. Their defenses had been up, ready to pack it in and call it a day. These fishermen were just going about their everyday tasks, ordinary routine and Jesus showed up. He showed up and made their defenses a great offense. He read the plays of the other team, he helped them catch more fish than they could handle and showed them that he really was worthy of the title coach. Although, I'm not sure what coach translates to into Greek. Pastor Fritz, did anybody teach you how to say coach in Greek at your seminary?*

Fritz: Seminary was so long ago, I can't remember. But what I do remember is the strategy articulated by so many NFL coaches and offensive coordinators. When they're interviewed, they will say "For

us to be effective offensively today, we need to be balanced. If we can run the ball half the time, and throw the ball about half the time, we think we'll be in pretty good shape." Some coaches refer to it as two pronged approach: ground attack, air attack. Friends, I think as Jesus takes Peter and these other fishermen into training camp, he uses the same challenge.

First, Jesus coaches his disciples to develop an air attack. We cannot follow Jesus with our heads down. We must keep our eyes up, following Jesus where he is going. In terms of spiritual disciplines, we're people who constantly pray, and pray how Jesus taught us, looking to our Father for our daily bread, looking to our Father for his will to be done in our lives, looking up to our Father for power to forgive, to be kept from evil, to resist temptation. In the air game, we're also people of praise. We sing songs of praise, we keep our ears open for the proclamation of God's Word, we come up with open eyes and hands for the Lord's Supper.

But of course, an effective "air approach" of constant prayer, Scripture reading, and corporate worship as we build a vertical relationship with God is balanced with a ground game where we're growing in faith horizontally with the neighbors God has called us to love. Jesus models for us the importance of small groups, where we encourage, study, and fellowship with one another. Jesus teaches through word and deed, that unless we serve one another and our neighbors, we don't activate his love and our faith is dead.

So on this Superbowl Sunday, if the commentators were analyzing your performance, what would be their critique? Do you have a balanced air and ground approach when it comes to your spiritual disciplines? Would they suggest some more horizontal plays designed in your life for serving others? Would you be stronger if your playbook featured more frequent Bible study and strengthened the vertical element of your offense? Friends, go ahead and make some adjustments.

And that brings me to my second point. One of the endearing features of our gospel today is that the disciples were willing to try something NEW and listen to Jesus. They didn't tell Jesus that when it came to fishing, they were the pros and he was a novice, and insist on doing things their own way. They took a leap of faith, and tried a new play designed by Jesus. That makes a football game exciting, too, doesn't it? Wildcat formation, flea-flicker, double-reverse, play

action pass. There can be big dividends when you try something new.

One of the new possibilities at Epiphany has been the Christ Renews His Parish Experience. Last fall, we had friends from Upper Arlington Lutheran come over and sponsor both a men's and women's weekend. Since that time, both men and women's teams have met weekly for fellowship, to take a fresh look at what Jesus' call means in our lives, and to grow a bit as we share our faith stories with one another. This April, we're offering a Renewal weekend for a second group of Epiphany men and women. Maybe you hear that and it sounds as crazy as tossing the nets out again after you've been fishing all night. But who knows, maybe like those disciples in Galilee who take a chance on Jesus, this "something different" is just what you need to grow right now. We'd ask you to prayerfully consider this Renewal opportunity—and so many other "new" options you have at Epiphany to enrich your game plan.

Friends, a final point: It would be awesome to be at Sun Life stadium in Miami later today to watch the Superbowl with 65,000 other fans. Some of you have told me about your stories actually seeing a Superbowl live and the atmosphere is electric. But you know, I'm not sure the REAL point of the day is to see if the Colts or Saints will win. To me, it sounds like the big cats in the advertising world know that this is an opportunity to capture the attention of millions of people who will be watching around the world, and to have them watch their commercial, hear their message, so they will buy their product. And in 2009, companies will pay \$3 million for 30 seconds of such air-time.

I wonder if the same dynamic operates in our gospel. It's a show stopper when Jesus helps his friends catch so many fish the boats start sinking. That night, everyone is going to have one heck of a fish fry. But that's not the real point, is it? The point is that people will realize who Jesus really is. (Let me ask you this: Who is playing for the Superbowl's half-time show? The Who? Who? Yes, the band known as The Who is the half-time feature.)

The point of the gospel, all four of them, is that we might know who Jesus is. It's pretty cool that Jesus changes water into wine so a wedding reception can keep going. It's pretty cool that Jesus fed 5,000 people when they were without food. It's pretty cool that Jesus

raised Lazarus from the dead. It's pretty cool that fish are flopping today. But those events don't mean anything if people don't, through them, come to know who Jesus really is, and believe in him.

Those first disciples got that. It's why they didn't stick around for the fish fry, and instead, as Luke says, "left everything and followed Jesus."

**Sara:** *That's right, the "so what" here is all of the crowds gathered. All the people that these folks - who were fishermen and are now disciples of Jesus - are going to reach. The importance isn't the thousands of fish they caught that day, but the millions of people that will be caught by the gospel message, by the promise of hope through Jesus' death and resurrection. That's where the true power in the game is. Sure, the Super Bowl is played in a pretty special place. Lots of people have made their way to the southeastern edge of Florida this week just to sit in Sun Life Stadium for a few hours and be dazzled by great passes, solid tackles, and the Who at halftime. But Jesus doesn't limit himself to these extraordinary places and extraordinary events. Jesus shows up in the midst of practices, when heads are hanging, when we're ready to pack it in and say enough is enough. Jesus calls us to try just one more time. To do what he has called us to do, to have a little faith in where he is leading and to push out just a little bit deeper into the waters. It may not seem like much, but with Jesus, with his grace our tasks become extraordinary.*

*Let's keep in mind the disciples were just doing their everyday tasks. They didn't set out to have Jesus change who they were, he just showed up. The disciples didn't earn his favor. He called them and made them a part of his team. Just as he has done for each of us. Jesus shows up, claims us as his own and puts us in the game.*

*For that all of God's children can say, "Thanks be to God!"*