

The Encounter that Makes us Follow.

The original Spider-Man movie, begins with a very ordinary fellow, Peter Parker undergoing a radical transformation. Bitten by a radio-active spider, he acquires superpowers. Soon, beneath his spandex he swings each night between the skyscrapers, looking for some endangered person to save.

One such object of rescue is Mary Jane, a young woman who Peter is secretly in love with. But Mary Jane has fallen not for the ordinary Peter but for Spider-Man his secret alter-ego. But Peter, of course, will not even reveal his secret identity to Mary Jane even after he comes to her rescue. (That would be against the super hero's code.)

So the scene is just after Peter and M.J. part company outside a diner late one night. Four thugs approach M.J. and back her into an alley. Peter watches as one of the men pulls a knife on her. M.J. tries to defend herself for a moment, then, suddenly Spider-Man appears, spins a web, and ties up the four bad guys.

Later, as Peter and M.J. discuss this mysterious rescuer, and she confesses her love for Spider-Man. She's amazed to learn that Peter actually "knows" Spider-Man. In fact, Peter admits he's had a "conversation" with Spider-Man *about Mary Jane*. Of course, she presses him to know what Peter had told her hunky heartthrob about her.

Peter searches for the right words;

*"I said, um, 'Spider-Man,' I said, 'the great thing about [Mary Jane] is when you look in her eyes, and she looks back in yours, everything feels not quite normal, because you feel strong; and weak at the same time. You feel excited, and at the same time terrified. The truth is you don't know the way you feel, **except you know the kind of man you want to be.** It's as if you've reached the unreachable, and you weren't ready for it."*

Elapsed time: Measured from the beginning of the opening credit, this scene begins at 01:30:25 and lasts approximately two-and-a-half minutes. Spider-Man, Columbia Pictures, 2002., written by Alvin Sargent, directed by Sam Raimi.

This could be a description of an encounter with Christ. It's what happens when we enter into communion with him, when we, by faith, can sense his gaze upon us, when by the Holy Spirit he says, "follow me." It's what we feel when we 'survey the wondrous cross': *weak*, but made strong, *scared to death* and yet at the same time more alive than we've ever been before. But most of all, we see in Jesus *the person we want to be*.

The Communion Table is an encounter that makes us follow, that renews our energy and our passion, that take us to a new level on our journey. Simon Peter had this kind of encounter on his fishing boat one day. It brought him to his knees. He didn't feel *worthy* of following Christ nor prepared to give up fishing for fish and start fishing for people. But he was at least willing to *make a start*. This is a story of an encounter with Christ and what happened next. What changed those men will change *us*. We will see the person we want to be.

If we enter into this story in **Luke 5: 1-11**, we will find ourselves among the crowds that day, among the fishermen that would begin to follow Jesus. For them it began with. . .

One ear open (1-4)

A large, lively crowd has gathered by the Lake of Gennesaret (which, by the way, is just another name for the Sea of Galilee). There's an obvious interest in this neighbourhood about what Jesus would have to say. They strain their ears to hear, but on the beach where they have

gathered, the breeze off the lake is gusting and carrying away crucial words, hijacking the very words they are wanting to absorb. Recognizing the problem, Jesus sees two boats close by where some fishermen are washing the sea-weed off nets. He decides to prevail upon them. But as we imagine this scene and the sun and the surf, we find these everyday fishermen doing chores with one ear open to what Jesus has to say. They've cleaned their nets like this since they were boys, and just like we would listen to the radio or TV as we go about our routine, so they too are listening, but tuning in and out to only what interests them. Yet these are the men Jesus is about to ask to make a total commitment to him. But at the moment they are busy. They have jobs to do.

I'm in Home depot.

The menacing canyons of consumer-goods canyons loom over me. All I need today is a thingamajig. Where is it? I could spend hours and still not find it. My eyes quickly scan the horizon of stuff looking for a little just-in-time customer service. There's lots of people in the unmistakable orange Home Depot shirts, but I just can't catch anyone's eye. I want to scream: Take your eyes off those boxes! Get down off that ladder! Quit visiting with your coworkers! Don't pick up the phone, pay attention to me!

But it's pointless. And it dawns on me: I'm an *interruption* for those orange-shirted Home Depot employees. They have their routine. They're *busy* doing what they *must* do, but so much so that I have become an irritation. They'd prefer I wasn't in their building. They've forgotten why the Home Depot exists. A Home Depot isn't a place where people in orange shirts can count boxes. Or visit each other or talk on the phone. Or ignore their customer. They were hired to pay attention to the customer. And yes, they have to stock the shelves and do the inventory and answer the phones and everything else. But at the same time they need to keep *one* ear open.

Could I be describing the church? It's not a new problem. It's been like this since the day Jesus first began to call disciples. In order for these fishermen to be his disciples, he needs both their ears. So Jesus enters their space and makes an unusual request . . .

Put out a little from shore

When does a sense of Jesus' calling first arise to our consciousness? Doesn't it require some sort of interruption? It's a simple request, really: "Pull your boat out a little bit so I can use the prow as my podium. A minor inconvenience: take a lunchbreak, let me use your boat. That's all. Yet as they agree to do this small favour, his words become a greater focus of their attention. They can begin to listen with *both ears*.

When Christ begins to call us, he always begins by asking us to take one small step out of our routine. But then comes a second and more unusual request:

Put out into the deep

This is the first real screening of potential applicants. Are they willing to do something that not only takes up a little more of their time but also, on the surface any way, doesn't seem to make much sense? It's the middle of the day! You can't catch fish right now!

The fishermen are not couch potatoes. Life is hard. They don't have time to waste. They're sensible men with work to do. But will they open their lives to a remarkable work of *God*?

People who have faith *do* things. They are not just hearers of the word, but those keep one ear open to hear what God has for them to *do*. If you are being called to work a fishing boat,

work a fishing boat. If your calling is to get through High School. . . . care for your kids. . . get into the car and go to work. . . . volunteer free time

The trick is always to keep one ear open to God and be willing to respond to some unusual requests. What unusual thing might God ask of *you*? *Keep one ear open and then . . .*

Embrace the miracle 5

Simon is a seasoned fisherman. He would bet his bottom dollar that no one would ever catch fish at *here* at *this* time of the day. Plus the fact that this isn't even a good day for fish anywhere on the lake. Simon doesn't need an electronic fish-finder to know the fish just aren't around right now, and yet, even so, he obeys Jesus' word. He is ready to embrace whatever comes. Even reluctant obedience shows a significant amount of faith. Do you know that acts of faith don't always have to make sense? An act of faith is something done "*because you say so, Lord.*"

"I will let down the nets."

Mike Yacanolli tells the story of Gertie. At seventy-six years of age, she became concerned about the young people in her church, so she volunteered to help with the highschool youth group.

"What do you want to do? The pastor asked.

"I don't know", she said. "God and I will think of something."

Gertie wasn't a speaker or a teacher, she felt too old to play games. . . .

But she had a camera, so she took pictures of every kid in the youth group. She put them on flash cards and on the back wrote information about the kid. She memorized the important details regarding the life of each young person. Then she stood by the door of the youth rooms every Sunday night and said goodbye to each kid by name and promised to pray for them. Over the years the church's young people discovered that Gertie had the Bible practicably memorized, so they came to her with the questions and struggles of their young lives.

Ten years of youth ministry later, at *eighty six*, Gertie suffered three strokes. The whole prospect of her death distressed every kid in the youth group. They wanted to help her. They wanted to be there for her the way she had been there for them. But now *they* were the ones who didn't know how.

So the youth leader came up with an idea.

He said, "Gertie, I want to do your funeral."

"I know," she said, "I *want* you to do my funeral. . . . but I'm not dead *yet*."

"Yes," he said, "but I want to do your funeral *while your still alive*, so you can hear just how much you mean to our youth group and our church."

Gertie bought into the idea. And the youth group and their leader planned the funeral which became a kind of youth-group reunion. Many young men and women packed out the service. Many now were in college or graduated, married, some the with children of their own. Ten years worth of stories were told.

At the end, as group of high schoolers gathered mysteriously at the back of the room, And to understand that they were about to do, you have to be let in on a personal detail regarding Gertie: she loved designer perfumes like Este Lauder 's Beautiful, which was her favourite.

The young people walked down the aisle, clumped together to hide something. When they arrived at the front where Gertie sat, they held up a very large and very expensive bottle of

Beautiful cologne which they proceeded to break open and pour out completely on Gertie's feet. Gertie embraced the miracle of God's kingdom. We can confess Christ all our lives. But it's what we *do* matters.

Ten years earlier Gertie responded to the Lord's unusual request. She let down the net and now it had come up filled with all kinds of fish.

How might God be asking you and me to let down the nets? What non-sensical act of faith will be requested of us? Will we do it? Let's read . . .

Verse 6-7

The resulting catch is crazy. They fill Simon's boat, then they filled another boat until both boats begin to sink. Somewhere in this bizarre moment, these men realize that *this* miracle is not about *fish*. It's about the kingdom. Who cares about the fish at this point? God did this. But why?

The Lord's Table is a miracle. Not in the sense of bread or wine or any change that happens with them. The miracle is about what happens when we embrace the rule and reign of God breaking into our lives. That day, on those fishing boats Jesus was preparing these awestruck men for a new reality of life in the kingdom, and a new responsibility in God's creation. It's not about the fish, it's about men and women coming to God through Jesus, and to Jesus *through* them.

The encounter we have at the Lord's Table makes us follow. Keep one ear open, embrace the miracle. But as Peter stands knee deep in slimy, flipping fish he deeply feels . . .

The need to be transparent. (8-10a)

He's fished all his life, and he's never seen anything like this. God has broken into this fisherman's world and now this fisherman is scared witless and astonished and filled with a great sense of unworthiness to be in the presence of One who has such power and knowledge. God is looking right into his heart and it's terribly uncomfortable for him. But he needs this. He would need this time and time again.

At the Lord's Table, we confess our faith – we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. To deal with human sin once and for all, God became a human, died on the cross to bring us forgiveness. But as we encounter this One who died and rose again we are *transparent* – like jellyfish. We realize God sees our inner needs. Our vulnerabilities. We can hide nothing from him. We should, we **MUST** feel like jelly within. Because we come here to find GRACE. As we prepare our hearts to receive Christ afresh, let's allow the Holy Spirit to jiggle us and make us aware of a deep awe and deep awareness of our deepest human need. Let him *clarify* anything in our lives that would leave us less than transparent to God's light shining through us to the world.

What colour is *your* jelly?

Keep one ear open, embrace the miracle, be transparent. But there's one more thing that results from the encounter with Jesus that makes us his followers:

We become imitators of Christ. 10b-11

Luke tells us "They left everything, and followed him".

To be among us, God left everything: his throne of glory, his absolute sovereign control over nature, became subject to the powers of this world – "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Let's use some imagination so we can round off this story. If we don't we will miss the true meaning. What do you think these fishermen did next? I don't know for sure, but I think that within the hour these guys were hard at work gutting fish. They sold it. They were practical men and I don't think the Lord gave them such a bonus to be wasted. So with a bit of extra money in their wallets, they informed their families, they secured their possessions. They were fishermen with responsibilities and homes. But the statement in verse 11 is definitive of how their lives had changed:

They pulled their boats up on the shore

They set aside the life they had lived before. The most powerful image in this story is not of them dropping and walking off behind Jesus. Consider the implications for these men of pulling their boats up onto the shore.

God's Son left his throne of glory. Pulled up the boat of his omnipotence and ease. Took up his cross.

What would that look like in your life and mine?