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What was Peter expecting when he let Jesus commandeer his boat as a pulpit? He had already met and heard Jesus and had even invited him to dine in his home where he saw Jesus heal his mother-in-law. Then the preaching carpenter said he wanted to preach from his boat. Why not? The guys had already lost the night in fruitless toil.

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

Psalms 138: 1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

When the inlander from Nazareth suggested that Peter head out for the deep, it must have seemed unrealistic and at least a little odd. It is one thing to build and furnish a house or even restore people to health, but professionals have their specialties and there was nothing to recommend Jesus as an expert in the realm of fishing. Nevertheless, Peter was nothing if not daring. Why not let the preacher learn about his limits?

This was only the first time that Jesus turned the tables on Peter. Little did Peter know that when he said, "At your command, I will lower the nets," he was paraphrasing Jesus' mother who told the angel Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word." Mary could have warned Peter that when you give God an inch, you have no idea where you will end up.



(Mark Bartholomew)

We know the story. Peter and his companions were overwhelmed at the catch. It was more than they could handle — physically or psychologically. Seeing what he could not understand, Peter reacted with fear. He fell before Jesus as he would before a ruler and respectfully asked him to let him be.

Most of us can sympathize with Peter. We have learned to live with moderate expectations. We know how to handle an occasional long, hard, unsuccessful work project. And besides, good preaching is a great boon and we would all be willing to lend someone our boat in order to hear it.

But when the preacher who promises good news makes incredible things actually happen, when going against good sense and proven practice turns out to be more successful than anything we have ever tried, the possibilities seem absolutely terrifying. It is unrealistic, but our small faith and tiny hopes are unexpectedly challenged.

Peter quickly assessed the situation. He saw that Jesus was offering more than he could handle. He knew intuitively that if he stayed with Jesus, nothing would ever be the same. So in typical fashion, he tried to wiggle out of the situation. He didn't run, but he asked Jesus to go away. (Luke doesn't pay attention to the fact that they were still out on the water when this interchange took place.)

Peter's first attempt to tell Jesus what to do came in the form of his explanation that he was too sinful for Jesus to work with. The fishing story was but a symbol of Peter's underestimation of Jesus' purpose and power, not to mention his love. Jesus was not about to leave, nor was he going to let the fishermen get away too easily. Making a pun that probably lightened the tension, Jesus ignored Peter's protest about being too sinful and told him and his friends that instead of catching fish, they would now be taking people captive. It was an offer they would not refuse.

That day on the boat was decisive. Peter and company had heard and seen Jesus. They had broken bread with him and seen his healing power. But the experience on the boat threw it all into a new perspective.

Of course, the extraordinary catch was mind-boggling. But more than that was Jesus' refusal to agree that they were unworthy. He was more than they had ever imagined, and yet he wanted them to join him. He didn't deny their weakness but assured them that they had no idea what they could accomplish if they let him lead the way. It was his love that made the offer irresistible.

Luke tells us this story about Peter and his buddies so that we can find ourselves in it. As we read the Gospel, we will note that the extraordinary catch was just that. Their days were not filled with unmitigated success. But that one experience had caught them up in Jesus' net. They saw enough to know that they couldn't imagine what was possible — and that was the good news Jesus preached.

Perhaps the question of the day is whether we are willing to allow Jesus to commandeer our boats. Peter would warn us that allowing Jesus onto our turf will not turn out as we might expect. We will become painfully aware of our inadequacy and sinfulness. And in the midst of that, we may be captivated and discover how our small faith and tiny hopes can grow into extraordinary and miraculously realistic expectations.

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Editor's note: *This Sunday Scripture commentary was originally published in the January 2019 issue of [Celebration](#), a comprehensive pastoral resource. To read the full version of the commentary, click [here](#). Sign up to receive [weekly Scripture for Life emails](#).*

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