

**Sermons from Archwood United Church of Christ
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Luke 5: 1-11
"Try it Another Way"

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It's annoying, isn't it, when someone insists, "No, *this* is how you do it." "*This* is what you need to do," and then proceeds to take over. It's one thing if they're trying to help you solve a problem. It's another when they are just being bossy. Amen, anyone? Some people are just bossy. And sometimes it's just easier to let them think they are in charge. And, just as annoying at times, sometimes they are right. We have been looking at the problem or issue the same way for so long we can't see anything new.

There's an illustration of this in the movie *Working Girl*. Telling the story of how Melanie Griffith's character got two businessmen to approach a merger a different way, the owner told the group assembled how a semi-truck once got stuck under a bridge. The truck was wedged under the bridge and all kinds of people were advising what to do to get the truck out – police, firefighters, engineers... Traffic was stopped as people watched and waited for the road to be cleared. Finally a little girl walked up and said, "Why don't you just let some air out of the tires?" And, sure enough, it worked. Air was let out of the egos of the experts too. What could that little girl know? And just what did Jesus know about fishing? Sometimes we need to listen when we're told "try it another way" or "try it again."

What did Jesus know about fishing? Picture the scene. The fishermen had been out on the lake all night long with no success. They were exhausted. Their muscles were sore. They were dirty and sweaty as they cleaned their smelly nets, with barely enough energy to finish the job before going home to sleep. Here comes along this man who wants Simon to let him speak from his boat. They might have known he was a traveling teacher but no one more significant than that. There were always these frauds roaming the land trying to get people to believe them, like traveling snake-oil salesmen. Did they really have the time and energy to accommodate this one? Perhaps somewhat begrudgingly, Simon

did as this man asked. And as the fishermen worked, they listened. Maybe a little intrigued, but still exhausted. When Jesus was done, he told the men to go back out and try fishing again - after they had just finished cleaning their nets. Talking under their breath they thought "what nerve!" They were *experienced* fishermen. What could this man know? "Master, don't you know how hard we have already worked. But, OK, since you asked." When people are being bossy, sometimes it's just easier to let them think they are in charge than to argue - "No, I want to do it *this way*."

We know the rest of the story. They were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken - swamping their boats with the abundance. They were dumbfounded, flabbergasted, shocked at the overwhelming abundance from trying it another way, trying it just one more time. How much easier it is to just give up trying. Wouldn't you rather just give up sometimes?

Well, there are two lessons here: One, when we try one way over and over, listen to someone who suggests that you try it another way. Two, when we're ready to give up, listen to someone who suggests, "Just do it one more time." Accepting help and not giving up - trying it another way - may produce an astonishing result. We too might be dumbfounded, flabbergasted, shocked at the overwhelming abundance from trying it another way, trying it just one more time, instead of giving up. Sometimes bossy people are right. (But, don't let it go to your head!)

There's more to the story than self-help instructions for how to gain an abundance in life, however. How do we know? Notice: They don't take the fish to the market and cash in. They bring in all the boats, their nets and their catch - a huge pile of fish on the beach - and leave everything behind and follow Jesus. We don't even know why. The popular telling of this story says, "Come follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men, or fishers of people." But scripture actually only says that he tells Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Even the old King James version reads: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." More dumbfounded, flabbergasted, and shocked at the overwhelming abundance of a product that can make them rich, they are moved to give up everything, to leave everything behind.

Among the abundance of preachers on television today is LeRoy Thompson Sr. who's only message I hear, over and over, is God wants you to be wealthy, or as he calls it, our "right" to covenant wealth. When Abraham was blessed with land and goats and children as numerous as the stars, Thompson claims we are entitled to this material wealth too. He chooses every scripture lesson, and uses every sermon, to prove this one point and, logically, how listening to him will make it happen. A few years ago all the rage was over a little book called the *Prayer of Jabez*, and all the accompanying journals, CDs, calendars, pens, and t-

shirts you could buy. The purpose was to pray every day that God “enlarge your territory” and watch what happens after 30 days. Perhaps God *will* bring us great wealth, if that is God’s will.

But, what did those who were his first disciples do? After hauling in the biggest catch of their lives, they left it all behind, they walked away. They encountered the power of God and suddenly everything else seemed very small. They tried it another way, just one more time, and the results were overwhelming. They got everything and more that they needed and wanted. They needed to make a living and one would assume they wanted a good life. When they witnessed the miracle of abundance, they left it behind. Now, for them, it’s not about what God can give *to* me, it is how God can give *through* me. They decide to follow the one who made it happen – to try their life another way.

Now, what does that say to us? How many of you think you have an abundance? You don’t need to raise your hand, but consider the question. Do you have plenty? Do you think you have an abundance? Sure, I’ve got an abundance of problems. I’ve got an abundance of bills. I’ve got an abundance of ungrateful people who try to mooch off me. But try thinking about it another way. If when you put out into the water one night and all you haul up in your nets is a stack of what you don’t have, what you are lacking, come to shore, clean out your nets, listen to Jesus, go out and try it again. Listen to Jesus teach about God’s power and try it another way. Am I trying to get God to give *to* me, or am I asking God to give *through* me?

I admit. At various times I have spent too much time worrying about our church’s finances. I would put my net into the water and all I came up with was “here’s a debt, there’s a debt, everywhere a debt, debt. Old McDavid had a church. E-I-E-I-Owe.” I would come into shore, tired and sore, energy wasted. I thought: try it another way. Jesus’ radical teaching: How about if I pray about it and leave it alone. Concentrate on doing everything else that is necessary to fulfill our calling, carry on our ministry of hope and healing, love and acceptance. Later, not immediately as someone impatient might be, but later, when the nets came back up, they were full of a gift that was abundant enough to meet our need and a little bit more - in fact we got to share a little of our blessing.

However, I’m grateful that we are still left with a gap between what has been pledged to the church and what the church needs. Why I am grateful for that? Because there is nothing so dangerous than when Christians think “someone else will do it.” “Someone else will take care of it.” That leaves no expectation of the rest of us. Ever have someone think you’d amount to nothing? They had no expectations of you. But much *is* expected of every one of us – to use every talent and ability we have been given – to discover them, to develop them, to use them. We all have so much to give. That someone else will do it for us

leaves no thought on our part of what God has been providing through each of us to address the needs of the whole. If necessary, think of yourself in another way. Try it again. What do you really want? Ask: Am I trying to get God to give to me, or am I asking God to give through me? Try it another way. See what happens. Perhaps a bossy friend has been trying to tell you this all along!

There's one last thing. Trying it another way, seeing our self another way, trying it yet another time, might be frightening. Have we been burned before? Jesus has something to say about that: Don't be afraid. Simon Peter's response to seeing that abundance of fish is strange. He said to Jesus: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Did he think he wasn't worthy of that abundance? Jesus doesn't answer that, doesn't say anything about that. He responds by telling him not to be afraid, but, I wonder, afraid of what? Afraid of what might come next? Afraid of what might be expected of him, or worse, afraid that he was not capable? I'm sure if we were in his shoes it might be a combination of the above. How often do we question our worth, our abilities, afraid to know what God really expects of us, assuming it's better to think we can't do something than to know that God can do all things through us.

Let's try it another way: I *am* worthy. I *am* able. I *do* want to know what God expects from me. It *is* better to ask how God can give *through* me than it is to ask what God can give *to* me. Let's try it another way: The church isn't here to give *to* me. That might be the most frustrating thing I ever hear – what have you done for me lately? The church is here to give *through* me. Now, if the church isn't helping you live out your calling, encouraging you to service, offering ways to grow in your Christian faith, then, together, we have our work to do. The Archwood Talents Ministry that is being developed from the strategic plan is meant to address that very need.

Let's try it another way. Repeat after me:

I am worthy

I am able

I want to know what God expects of me

I want God to work through me

Now, consider this one carefully before repeating it back:

More than I want God to give to me.

Careful what you ask for! Imagine how full our nets would be after we all embraced that!