

Doing What Matters?

Luke 5:1-11

Let's begin with a question. If you met someone who was hurting, who had lost their job, or were maybe afraid of losing their home, or were worried about their children, if you truly wanted to show God's care for that person, what could you do?

While you think about your answer, let's remember the story

Luke tells us Jesus is near Capernaum, standing by the Sea of Gennesaret talking with a crowd of people who are hoping to hear a word of hope from God. The crowd is growing so big it is becoming difficult for him to be seen and heard by them all.

Jesus noticed two boats tied up at the shore with the fishermen sitting nearby, mending their empty nets. He walked over, asked one of them if they would be willing to take him out onto the lake, away so he could talk to the people. One of the men, we're told it was Simon, agreed to help. Jesus stood in the boat where he could be seen and heard and talked to the people. When he finished, he noticed Simon's empty nets and asked him to row the boat further out into the deeper water and throw the nets one more time. Simon said to him, "Master, we spent the entire night out here and didn't catch a thing. None of us. We finally gave up and were sitting there talking about having to sell our boats when you came over and asked me to bring you out here."

But for some reason, maybe because he had listened to what Jesus had been saying to the crowds, Simon said, "I'm afraid it's a waste of time, but if you want me to do it, I will give it one more try."

Simon rowed further out into the deeper water and threw his nets over the side of the boat. He watched the nets sink into the water, and then slowly began to pull them back up. He stopped. "It feels like the nets are caught on a rock," he said. He leaned over and looked down into the water and saw the nets almost overflowing with fish. He looked up and saw Jesus smiling at him. He pulled again on the nets that were heavier than he ever remembered. Then he began to worry the nets were going to break. Simon turned to the shore and yelled for the others to come and help him, and finally, Simon Peter, James, and John pulled in the nets filled with more fish than they had ever caught before. The three men were amazed and fell on their knees afraid of the power they had just seen. Jesus told them to relax, to not be afraid, and told them that from that moment on, they would help him catch people and not fish.

Now, let's go back to that question I asked at the beginning. If you met someone who was hurting, who had lost their job, or were maybe afraid of losing their home, or were worried about their children, if you truly wanted to show God's care for that person, what could you do?

If we were out fishing most of us wouldn't know the secrets of where the fish are hiding. But there are many other things we could do if we wanted to care for someone in need. If we are honest with ourselves, there are probably some things we could do that might directly ease at least some of that person's pain.

So, the first question is, what "could" we do to show God's care for that person?

Out of all the things we might be able to do or say, what are the things that might make a difference in the life of that person, right now? There are many things we could do that might make us feel better but would not change that person's situation in the least. That is not what we are looking for if we want to show God's love for that person. What can we do that will make a difference for them, right now?

And it might not make everything better forever, but perhaps just long enough for that person to know that someone cares, and because of that, there might still be hope. It might help them take another breath and find the courage to throw their nets out one more time.

The second question is, what “should” we do to show God’s care for that person?

To answer that, we will need to take the time to get to know a bit about that person, what has brought them to this point, what is most important to them, and what they care about the most. What matters right now? How can I care for them in a way that will mean something in their life?

For example, how do you help the fishermen? Help them catch fish.

If that person lost their job, is afraid of losing their home, or is worried about their children, does it show God’s care for them if we say we will pray for them, suggest they be patient, or assure them that God knows what God is doing and will never give us more than we can handle? Is it God’s care to remind them they can learn from their mistakes, or to encourage them to try and understand what God is teaching them through their pain? No.

I am not saying we should not let people know if we are praying for them. But I am saying that we must be honest with ourselves and answer the question if praying for them is all that we have to offer them. Prayer is wonderful, but sometimes a touch is even better.

God’s care might be in providing a meal, sitting and listening, or showing that we value them enough to stop and not just go past them. It could be many things that have meaning and might give a glimpse of hope. Our role, as children of God, is to take the time to find those things that will matter, and then do them.

Sometimes, if we truly want to be of help, we need to take the time to recognize and do something about our own personal feelings. Those personal feelings that lead us to think that the person we see hurting could probably fix the situation themselves if they just try harder. Those feelings that lead us to think that some people are more worthy of our help than others because of where they are from, or what they have done, or anything else we might use to divide people into categories. Those personal feelings that lead us to think that the person experiencing pain probably deserves it.

Let me say that, yes, I do realize there will be times that some people will take advantage of our caring for them. Yes, some people are playing a game and using people like us to their own ends. But not all of them. If we do care enough to take the time to get to know what is going on with that person, it is usually obvious when someone is playing the game and when someone has truly lost all hope. There may be times our caring is taken advantage of but the real danger we face is that we might refuse to care for those in real need to avoid being taken advantage of by others. Our role is to care. We’ll let God sort out the rest.

Let’s end by asking the question one more time. If, on your way home today, you met someone who was hurting, who had lost their job, was maybe afraid of losing their home, or was worried about their children, if you truly wanted to show God’s care for that person, what could you do?

Jesus asked us to “Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

Tend and feed.

Tend and feed. Amen.