

February 6, Epiphany 5C (Luke 5:1-11)

The disciples focused on what they could control: the state of their nets.

by [Amy Zietlow](#) in the [January 26, 2022](#) issue

A basketball hoop looms tall at the side of our driveway. It has seen many a game of horse played by my husband and sons. To win at horse—making as many shots as possible, thus avoiding spelling *horse*—requires not only skill but creativity. A player can compound the difficulty of a shot by calling “nothing but net,” which requires the ball to go through the hoop without touching the backboard or rim. When I read Jesus’ recruitment of the fishing disciples, my imagination is caught by nothing but net.

Up to this point in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has been on his own, a solitary prophet in the Galilean countryside. He has launched a ministry of healing and preaching. Chapter 5 marks his moment to call disciples who will join his team.

Nets play a prominent role. The disciples are cleaning their nets (in Matthew and Mark they are mending them), Jesus asks them to put down their nets in deep water, Simon agrees as an act of faith, and the nets are filled to breaking.

For an ancient fishing crew, a net was a basic and valuable piece of equipment. It was integral to their livelihood. Fishing crews around the Lake of Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) had to be skillful in using a net in both shallow and deep-sea fishing. When they stuck to shallow waters, they navigated the rocky shore, using the net as a dragnet to be cast out in the water and then brought back to shore while hauling in fish. When fishing in deeper waters, they typically did not go alone, as Jesus asks Simon to do. Two boats worked as a team, stretching a net between them, circling around the fish, and then pulling in the catch to one of the boats.

These fishermen knew their nets well, because nets required daily care and attention. They were made of flax or linen, and debris and silt could get caught in them along with the dead fish, sticks, weeds, and trash. Nets needed to be cleaned,

mended, and hung to dry after every fishing trip. These fishermen knew how to use their nets with skill.

So I can imagine their consternation at fishing all night and catching nothing. This failure must have been a rare occasion for a seasoned fishing crew. That day, they must have held their nets in frustration. These future disciples were defined by their nets, which came to represent their lives and their internal sense of control over the day-to-day tasks of life. And thus, as Jesus preached nearby, they were focused on what they could control: the state of their nets.

Nets today look different for most of us but represent no less of an integral part of life. My net is my ever present to-do list, which holds a lineup of daily tasks awaiting my care and attention: edit the bulletin, write the sermon, prepare the Bible study, teach confirmation, send that email. The net of my life is a delicate but well-known weave of daily ministry tasks. I know my net well, I cross off my tasks diligently, but how often do I confuse this net of vocation with discipleship? Have I become nothing but net?

When Jesus asks Simon and his fishing cohort to cast their nets in deep water, he is asking them to sacrifice their nets, their former perceptions of identity and worth. The net of their lives breaks in order to be transformed. Jesus invites them to let go of their old routines and identities with the promise of abundant life beyond their abilities. A former life defined by daily fishing tasks can become a new life of hope and faith in the in-breaking presence of God in the world.

Simon is not ready and does not feel worthy of what is happening to his life. How scared I would be to let go of my to-do list and my treasured daily acts of crossing things off of it. Without my daily tasks, would I question my worthiness to follow Jesus? The breaking net exposes Simon's own limitations but becomes an invitation to see the purpose of his life in a new light. Working without a net is scary, though. They leave the shore to gather fish, a task they can do in their sleep, and they return with a call to gather people. The nets of their lives have a new and foreign purpose.

So do ours. We clean and mend our lives for the sake of providing sanctuary and connection to all people. We connect them with others to do more than we can do alone.

Jesus sets up no trick shots nor asks us to aim for perfection. He simply calls and asks us to follow. His ministry will change our lives, breaking up and challenging our expectations and transforming our gifts with abundance and grace. Our lives will have purpose beyond what we can imagine. As Christ's hands and feet in the world, we become a holy net, knit together in service.