

SERMON – Feb. 4, 2007
Luke 5 “Afraid?”

G&P
Bryan Wilkerson:

I once ran in the New York City Marathon. The first half of that race is a party. You're swept along by 28,000 runners, crowds lining the streets, and people running in costumes. You're touring the ethnic neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens. You feel like you could run forever. At mile 13, you cross over into Manhattan and start heading north, away from the finish line. Central Park is behind you, and you're going in the wrong direction. The crowds are thinner now. The party's over.

At about mile 16 or 18, you hit the wall. You're absolutely miserable. Physically and psychologically, you're busted. All you want to do is stop running. I remember passing one of the first aid stations. There were runners lying on cots—pale and gaunt, with IVs dripping into their arms. I thought to myself, *Those lucky dogs*. At that point I began to despair. I imagined myself having to go home and tell everybody I didn't finish. Why did I ever sign up for this race? What made me think I could do this?

That's when it hit me. One way or another, I had to get to Central Park. That's where my ride was. I had no car. I had no money. I would have to get there on my own two feet. So I might as well keep running. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Don't think about the next 6 miles; just think about the next step. And if you can keep that up, keep putting one foot in front of the other, the miles pass. And when you cross that finish line, it feels like glory—even when you're in 10,044th place.

Some of you may be hitting the wall right now—feeling like you can't go on, like you'll never make it. Following Christ is harder than you ever imagined it would be, and you're thinking about giving up—about doing something foolish. Don't do it!

There's no magic to endurance racing. It's all about continuing.

Bryan Wilkerson, from the sermon "Endurance," PreachingToday.com
Fear had gripped him when he realized that he would have to finish the race in order to get back to his ride. He became dependent on finishing the race. He had to finish even when it meant to go beyond what he thought was possible. Life is about finishing. It is about finishing what we started.

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers."

—General George Patton, as heard from Chaplain George Metcalf

James P. Moore, Jr., *One Nation Under God: The History of Prayer in America* (Doubleday, 2005); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky

Courage to take the next step when bad news might be dogging you. Courage to walk with Jesus when worry and fear have stronger voices that say to give up the fight. Jesus wants all of us walk with him no matter the fear that we face or the worry that would move us down the wrong path.

As Jesus teaches in the boat, he shares with the people about God who loves us into action. Who loves us into forgiveness, who loves us into life. He speaks grace to them in order to light their faith on fire. Then he uses the boat and Peter as an illustration to grace and faith He tells Peter and the others to go out and let down the nets. They protest a bit because they had just spent the entire night fishing and came up with nothing. But if Jesus insists, they will do it. It is almost half hearted. They know that there are no fish out there. One does not go fishing in the late morning. The fish don't school up near the surface so that they can be netted.

But they do as Jesus says and all at once the water becomes alive with fish. They are literally jumping in the nets. All of a sudden it dawns on Peter that Jesus is more than just a great preacher, he has the power to call the fish into the nets. He has the power of the creator. He is humbled and declares the he is indeed a sinner and needs to get out of the presence of such a great man as Jesus.

But you can see the smile come across the face of Jesus. He as caught them and they rest in his net of grace. From now on they will be catching women and men and children in the name of God. The miracle has worked its magic on them. They see a glimpse of God in this miracle that will start them on their long trek of ministry.

Jesus simply says to the disciples and to us:

“Remember the Fish!”

Remember how I netted you in the waters of baptism!

Jesus will give them the power and the faith to finish the journey at hand. He starts with 2 and then four and then 8 and then 12 and then 16 and 32 and 64. And 2 thousand years later here we are walking the faith of Peter who dared to throw down the nets just to humor Jesus. Little did he know, and little do we know what is in store for us as we dare to walk in faith.

“Remember the Fish” says Jesus. But there are times in our life when we only remember what we did not catch. We only remember what someone said to us that brought us down. We know the drill,

we only hear the bad stuff and never a good word that will lift us up.

For more than 30 years, Gordon Mackenzie worked at Hallmark, eventually convincing the company to create a special title for him: "creative paradox." Along with challenging corporate normalcy at Hallmark, MacKenzie did a lot of creativity workshops for elementary schools. And those workshops led to a fascinating observation that he shares in his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*.

MacKenzie would ask the kids upfront: "How many artists are there in the room?" And he said the pattern of responses never varied.

In the first grade, the entire class waved their arms like maniacs. Every child was an artist. In the second grade, about half of the kids raised their hands. In the third grade, he'd get about 10 out of 30 kids. And by the time he got to the sixth grade, only 1 or 2 kids would tentatively and self-consciously raise their hands.

All the schools he went to seemed to be involved in "the suppression of creative genius." They weren't doing it on purpose, but society's goal is to make us less foolish. As MacKenzie says, "From the cradle to the grave, the pressure is on: Be normal."

After all of his research, he came to this conclusion: "My guess is that there was a time—perhaps when you were very young—when you had at least a fleeting notion of your own genius and were just waiting for some authority figure to come along and validate it for you. But none ever came."

Mark Batterson, [In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day](#) (Multnomah, 2006), p. 152

It is so easy to give up. We have people telling us all the time what we have done wrong. It is easy to point out what we do wrong. Half the time we already know it. Notice that Jesus did not chastise Peter and the others for being bad fisherman and if they were really good fisherman that they would have caught something. He didn't say that did he. But we say it all the time. I am amazed at what I see in the coaching ranks these days. Coaches who never have a good word to say to their players. They do not even want to motivate them, just point out what they did wrong. We learn this and we pass it on. Shame is the gift that keeps on giving. The reason why I share this is because of a quote by Coach

Tony Dunge of the Indianapolis Colts, also a Sunday school teacher. He talks about being the first African-American coaches in the Super Bowl with Coach Lovie Smith of the Chicago Bears, another strong Christian. But what was also important was this:

That coaches who do not yell and scream at their players can win, too.

Jesus washes away the guilt and shame that the world pours on us. He washes it away so that we can finish what the Lord Jesus has placed before us, a mission to walk in faith through the grace of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. To finish in spite of the voices in our heads and in our life that tell us that we cannot possibly finish what we start.

Roger Zerbe suffered from early onset Alzheimer's disease. His wife, Becky, remembers a journal entry he left for her after a particularly troubling bout of forgetfulness.

"I picked up the journal on my pillow and read:

Honey,

Today fear is taking over. The day is coming when all my memories of this life we share will be gone. In fact, you and the boys will be gone from me. I will lose you even as I am surrounded by you and your love. I don't want to leave you. I want to grow old in the warmth of memories. Forgive me for leaving so slowly and painfully.

Blinking back tears, I picked up my pen and wrote:

My sweet husband,

What will happen when we get to the point where you no longer know me? I will continue to go on loving you and caring for you—not because you know me or remember our life, but because I remember you. I will remember the man who proposed to me and told me he loved me, the look on his face when his children were born, the father he was, the way he loved our extended family. I'll recall his love for riding, hiking, and reading; his tears at sentimental movies; the unexpected witty remarks; and how he held my hand while he prayed. I cherish the pleasure, obligation, commitment, and opportunity to care for you because I REMEMBER YOU!"

That is the word of grace that moves us to finish well. We are remembered in the very heart of God so that we can go out like Peter, Andrew, James and John and net people for God.

Remember the Fish!

AMEN