

Life Hacks

Luke 5:1-11

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When I was a kid, my grandparents owned this gigantic car, a Rambler, 1961, I think, brown, long as a boat.

Had those vinyl bench seats, so three or four of us could sit in the back seat, and one kid, usually me, always had to sit in the middle of the front bench seat, which would have been okay except that everytime Granddaddy changed gears you got bopped in the nose.

I said it was long, and it was, but my grandparents' garage wasn't -- and the Rambler fit with just inches to spare.

So we went through this ritual everytime my granddad pulled into the garage: he would inch forward cautiously,

then stop and get out and try to close the garage door, which inevitably wouldn't close 'cause the back end of the car was still sticking out, then he'd get back behind the wheel and put it in drive again, whacking my nose, and creep forward and hit wall of the garage. Every time.

Until one day he did something which I thought was genius --

he got a piece of string, tied a tennis ball to the end,

and while the Rambler was sitting, parked perfectly, in the garage,

he hung the tennis ball from the ceiling of the garage so that it rested on the windshield of the car.

And from then on, when he pulled into the garage, as soon as he hit the tennis ball, he knew to stop the car right there.

I had not thought about my granddaddy's tennis ball trick

until two days ago when I was scrolling through my Facebook news feed, and there it was.

It was in an online article that someone had posted, on Life Hacks,

Life hack number 19, it said: if you have trouble knowing how far to drive into your garage, hang a tennis ball so it hits your windshield just right.

I would like to think that my grandfather invented this particular life hack, but I guess there's no proof of that.

One thing for sure: he had no idea that this was a life hack.

Because there was no such phrase in the 60's.

Or the 90's, for that matter, or even a decade ago.

We have the computing world to thank -- a hack is a way around a computing problem, and eventually that produced the phrase life hack, which is something that gets you around a real-life problem, something which, put simply, makes life work better.

A tennis ball from the ceiling of a garage, for instance.

Or, for example, any of the following, all of which can be found on various life hack lists floating around out there:

#1 If you are someone who regularly forgets where you've parked your car, do this: next time you park, pull out your phone and take a picture of where you are.

#2 Attach towel racks to the inside of your kitchen cabinet to hold your saucepan lids.

#3 Use empty egg cartons to store your Christmas ornaments -- a little late on that one, obviously.

#4 When you buy something in that horrible clamshell packaging, which no scissors can pierce, use a can opener.

#5 If you're out of kindling for the fireplace, Doritos work great -- honestly, that's what it said.

And, lastly, this one, which has disaster written all over it: if you like open face grilled cheese sandwiches, instead of having to turn on your oven, just lay your toaster flat on its side and put your bread and cheese in that way.

All of these, and the hundreds more that you will find, all of these shared by earnest folks who feel they have found ways to make life better.

All of which brings me to today's scripture story.

A story which, I realized yesterday, is about Jesus offering a life hack to Peter, roughly two thousand years before the phrase popped up.

Here's how the story goes.

It's really early in Jesus' ministry, we're only in chapter 5 of Luke's Gospel.

Jesus doesn't even have his twelve disciples, it's just him on his own, walking around, walking and talking and preaching and healing. And what's happened on this particular day is that the word has spread. The word has spread that there's something going on with this man, that you gotta hear him, this is something special. So people start coming from miles around, they want to hear him, see him, touch him. And it's just Jesus, remember, he doesn't have an entourage yet, he doesn't have bodyguards, and he finds himself at the edge of a lake, with this crazy crowd swarming, and it's getting pretty zoo-ey, and then Jesus gets this idea -- why not go stand on the deck of a boat to preach to the crowd. And catches sight of this guy he's met once before, this fisherman named Simon Peter, and he asks him if he can go stand on his boat, and Simon Peter says sure, and Jesus does, it's all good, he preaches from the boat.

And afterwards, Jesus says to Simon Peter, *how's the fishing going*, and Simon Peter says "terrible, really." And that's when Jesus offers this tip, his little life hack. He says, "go back out on the lake, but this time take me with you." And Simon Peter, reasonably, says, "due respect, sir, you're a carpenter, not a fisherman. I've been fishing all night, nothing's biting. Things are not good." And Jesus says again, "take me out with you. And let's just see what happens."

Out they go. And you *know* what happens. They catch so many fish that Simon Peter's nets can't hold them and he has to call to his friends James and John to come help out, and the fish fill two boats. Incredible abundance. More than he could possibly have hoped for.

If a life hack is something that makes things better, makes life a little easier,

well then, Jesus has just given Simon Peter a pretty amazing one.
Take me with you, Jesus said, that's my tip.
Take me with you, it'll make things go better this time.
And boy did it.

It is in fact life-changing for Peter.
And honestly it wasn't so much about the fish.
'Cause Peter ends up leaving them behind to follow Jesus.
It was that Peter found out what it was to be in the presence
of One who loved him powerfully enough
to come with him out on the waves and to help him try it again.

At its heart, our faith has this very simple conviction,
this very simple assurance:
things change if you let Jesus come with you.
This is the life hack our faith offers:
it makes a difference if you let Jesus come with you.

Yes, that sounds simple, maybe too simple.
But it's the truth.
It makes a difference if you let Jesus come along,
if you let Jesus come along on the journey.

Friday morning, David and I were at Pivot Ministries in Bridgeport,
the residential center for men who have struggled with addiction,
many also with jail time, some with homelessness.
David had been asked to preach to them that morning, at their weekly chapel service,
and as he preached about the Savior who loves each one of us,
the men murmured Amen, and nodded intently, and I saw some tears rolling down too.
And afterwards, one of the young men was talking to me --
they'll be here singing for us in a few weeks, so you'll get to meet them --
one of the young men was telling me
that he'd tried living life on his own, by his own strength, his own wits,
and it just didn't work.
I'm here at Pivot, he said, because I need someone with me, you know?

You can't do this alone.

So he's let Jesus come with him,
and there's strength in that, he's found, there's hope,
and he's not alone now, he's never alone.

I mentioned that the men from Pivot will be with us in a few weeks,
that's on March 1st.

A couple weeks after that, we'll have some other friends with us,
friends from the overseas ministries center in New Haven,
people who live out their faith as pastors and missionaries in places often of struggle
and even oppression.

And they do what they do because they have Jesus along with them for the journey;
they know, as well as anyone can know,
that life that is lived in companionship with him is life with hope and even great joy.

We've had speakers from OMSC join us before,
and I won't ever forget one man who came and spoke,
Diing, one of what came to be known as the Lost Boys of Sudan.
He left the Sudan on foot as a 9 year old boy, when his village was attacked,
and he and hundreds of other orphans walked for months to find safety.
Diing ended up in a refugee camp in Kenya, where he lived for 12 years.
And it was there, he said, that someone gave him a Bible,
and the Christians there taught him the stories of Jesus,
and he then he saw, he told us, that he would never be alone again;
he felt the presence of the one who would never leave him.
And in the strength of that presence, Diing has spoken out for peace and for hope
everywhere he goes,
and where he has gone is back to South Sudan,
where he speaks out in strength, and with a voice of justice, for all God's children.

What Jesus offers to us, as he offered to Simon Peter,
as he offered to the young man at Pivot, and to a young refugee named Diing,
is what I called earlier the ultimate life hack:
the possibility of living your life in the strength of God's presence,

living your life knowing that you are never alone,
and that far more is possible than you could have ever imagined.
What Christ offers to each one of us is a life transformed.
Whatever we live with now can be changed;
whatever doubts or sorrows or hurts or loneliness --
this is what he's got the fix for; this is the solution he offers.

It won't look the same for each one of us,
because our *lives* don't look the same;
but there is something in each of us, in each of our lives
that we've been trying to do alone.
And we don't need to.

When I was in India this year,
I was invited after our New Year's Day worship service to do two baptisms.
The baptisms, I was told, would be of two women who had decided to become
Christian.

For two Hindu women in rural India to take that step is a big deal:
to be Christian, something we don't think twice about,
is for them a brave and thoughtful declaration
that yes, they need Christ's presence in their lives,
that yes, they are inviting Jesus onto the boat with them.

So I was really happy to be asked to do these baptisms,
and I knew that I would be expected to do a full-immersion baptism,
you know, completely dunking the person being baptized.
There was a baptism font in front of the church, like a little concrete hot tub without the
hot part -- so I headed there.

"No," I was told, "the baptism is down the road."

So all of us, your India mission team, we piled into our van and we all went bumping
down the road, to, yes, a river, a river flowing deep and wide.

I'd Never done a river baptism before.

I remembered every story David had ever told about stepping on snakes during river
baptisms, and, I won't lie, I was nervous.

But I have to tell you, as I held those women in my arms,

and as they rose, gasping, from the river, water streaming down their faces as they smiled for joy,

I was so moved.

I was so moved that they were saying 'yes' with such certainty to a faith that most of us here were simply born into:

that they were saying 'yes' to Jesus, yes to his presence in their lives, yes to a different way of being and believing.

And in the end, that's what we're invited to do, too.

To say 'yes' just as those women did.

To say 'yes' as Diing did, to say 'yes' as my friend at Pivot did.

To say 'yes' as Simon Peter did.

To say 'yes' when Jesus says "I've got a better way to do this, how about it?"

You can call it a life hack if you want a kind of silly way to remember it.

Or you can just call it choosing to follow Christ.

Because that's what it is:

choosing to follow the One who promises us life abundant,

strength for the journey,

hope for tomorrow,

and love that never ends.

That's something to say 'yes' to.

Amen.