

The only good news about bad weather is it gives you an excuse. If there's something you're supposed to do that you don't want to do you can avoid doing it by blaming the weather.

For example, if a friend invites you jogging on Wednesday, and Wednesday morning the temperature is 0 degrees, just think of all the excuses you can use: My throat will freeze; I'll break a leg on the ice; I'll get a cold; I've got a cramp in my leg; I don't have clothes warm enough; I don't have time; I don't have the right shoes; my mittens don't match; I'm tired; if I lose weight my clothes won't fit. There are a million excuses not to exercise, not to quit smoking, not to quit drugs, not to eat right, not to pray. Bad weather is a great excuse.

When Peter meets Jesus today, Jesus invites him to discipleship. As far as we know, the weather was fine, so Peter couldn't get out of it easily. However, there are three excuses Peter could use. Three times in the story he faces an obstacle he must overcome if he is to follow Christ.

First is when Jesus asks to get into Peter's boat, and Peter is busy mending his nets. Jesus needs a little help to get away from shore so the crowd can hear his voice. Could Peter finish mending his nets later and help out? Peter had a great excuse. He could have, "No, I'm busy." And he was. He was doing what fishers are supposed to do when they're not fishing; namely, getting ready to fish again. But, he said instead, "I'm a fisher, not a chauffer, but I'll do it."

His second chance came after Jesus' speech. Jesus said to Peter, "You want fish? Try throwing your net over there." The second excuse sneaks onto Peter's lips. "We tried that. They ain't no fish today." It's a good excuse. Peter knew from experience that Jesus' idea wouldn't work. But he tries it. He must have liked Jesus. "If it'll make you happy, we'll try again." They try, and the catch was so great it nearly burst the nets and sank the boats. As happy as Peter must have been to see and smell those fish, I'm sure he was a little upset that he had to start mending the nets all over again.

This miracle presented Peter with his third dilemma. Does he follow Christ or does he go away? This time the third and greatest excuse comes to his lips. Not quietly, but thunderously. "Lord, I am not worthy of you. Go away from me." Again, it's a good excuse. It's so good that Peter cannot overcome it alone. Jesus must reassure him. "Don't be afraid. I will help you." Peter reflects on his excuses: I'm busy; I tried that; I'm not worthy. Then he leaves everything behind--all his excuses--and follows after Jesus.

Jesus fulfilled the longings of his heart. Peter was never the same again.

My brothers and sisters, Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. Jesus invites us to discipleship this Lent through prayer, fasting, and charity. While we're busy mending our nets he interrupts and asks, "May I step into your boat? May I ride with you this Lent?" We've got great excuses: "But, Lord, I'm busy. But, Lord, I've tried Lent before; it doesn't work. But, Lord, I'm not worthy to serve you." We've got great excuses. Who of us can leave them behind to come and follow Christ?