

February 10, 2019

Luke 5:1-11

There is so much richness in this story; a story, I assume, you all know well; at least, the non-inclusive line: “I will make you fishers of men.”

- There is the whole getting into a boat in order to speak to the crowd, presumably to avoid being too crowded by the crowd.
- It is Simon and Simon’s boat Jesus commandeers.
- After teaching the crowd Jesus has Simon take the boat out into “deep waters”; away from shore; away from most people’s comfort zone and into the unknown, which is what “deep waters” are.
- Jesus tells Simon to let down his nets for a catch, a pretty easy request, you would think. But Simon gives some pushback, and, hearing his pushback, Simon’s reluctance is understandable: “we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.” Simon had pulled an all-nighter. His plan had been to clean the nets after a very disappointing night, go home, and go to bed.
- But, to his credit, he catches himself (maybe because he had been listening to what Jesus was teaching) and said: Okay, “if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

And the rest is history: two overloaded boats with fish. We don’t know the market value, but one has to guess they could easily have taken a week off work.

That did not happen and now we are starting to approach some very important things for us.

- Instead of saying what a skilled fisherman am I, Simon gives all the credit to Jesus. In fact, the net filled with fish so overwhelms Simon, he falls on his knees and says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

- This moment and these words parallel a Hebrew scriptures story. It is Isaiah and his vision of standing before God. In that moment of recognition Isaiah falls on his face and said, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen” God!
- Simon’s words and action in this story tell us that Simon has just had an encounter with the divine.
- It is also worth noting that this encounter with the divine was transformational for Simon. We know this, because just before Simon says, “I am a sinful man!” he is identified as Simon Peter. Peter, Cephas (the Rock), is the name Jesus gives to Simon later, saying “on this Rock I will build my church.”

The story is now coming to its climax. Simon, in awe and fear of Jesus, is on his knees, begging to be spared. All he had been taught told him that seeing the divine was a death sentence. Thus, he begs Jesus to go away.

Instead, Jesus speaks to Simon and says, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

And then comes the part where the rubber hits the road: “they left everything and followed him.”

What has all of this to do with us?

First, Simon, exhausted from a night of fishing, chose to follow Jesus’ instructions, rather than his own exhausted body, and he let down the nets. How often have we faced a situation in life that challenges us to do something we just aren’t in the mood for or are fearful of doing, but know – thanks to our past Sunday School teachers and our church – but know it is what God would want us to do?

It is in those moments, when we are willing, like Simon was, to do that which we really don't want to do, but know it is the right thing to do, that we open ourselves to a possible encounter with the divine. It is right in the midst of our everyday lives and living that the divine is to be met, to be experienced.

The story concludes with "they left everything and followed him." For Simon, and the others, it meant leaving their job as fishermen to go into training under the tutelage of Jesus. This led them all through the countryside of Israel, as well as the urban areas, such as Jerusalem. After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, it led them all around the Mediterranean.

But following Jesus should not be thought of as some form of itinerant work. It is a way of life, not a road in life one travels down. You don't have to sell your home or car, but you do have to let go of all those things that keep you from living fully; that keep you from letting down nets in deep water or letting your net go altogether, trusting instead in God.

I cannot tell you what your nets are; what you need to do or not do in order for you to follow Jesus. What I can tell you is that the most important part of following Jesus is letting go of your fears –

- the fear of not enough, of whatever enough is, food, water, shelter
- the fear of the Other, the disliked neighbor
- the fear of death

As we let go of our fears, it will be easier to focus on following Jesus; seeking to live into the love he talked about and lived. When our focus is on Jesus and the love he

shared, the opportunities to give of ourselves – our time, our talent, our wealth – will be visible in a new way, as will the surprising results.

Not only will you transform other people, you will be transformed yourself, when, in your daily living, the motivation for all your actions is love of God, rather than love of money or self.

By following Jesus, by sharing God's love, we will be fishing for people and they will be caught up in the net of God's love.

So remember this story from Luke's Gospel; remember how Peter, exhausted, still followed Jesus, even when he thought it was futile. Then, try it out for yourself this week. Keep this story of Jesus in the forefront of your thinking and keep an eye out for the deep water God is calling you to cast your net into.

Do not be afraid – of the situation you find yourself in or of the fact that you might be transformed. Just leave everything that is getting in the way and follow Jesus.

You will be glad you did. Amen.