Epiphany 5

February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1-11

Commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Worldwide, it claims an estimated 24,000 lives every year.

Fishing is long, hard, exhausting work. This was just as true 2000 years ago, when Simon Peter, James, and John had been out all night. And they had caught *nothing*.

So maybe, as he was tending to his nets and looking forward to a few hours of sleep, Simon didn’t pay a lot of attention to the crowd that was growing on the lakeshore. Maybe he was preoccupied, worrying about how he would feed his family if the next night’s fishing was as futile.

But then Jesus walked over.

Simon had already encountered Jesus. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick, and Jesus healed her.

Perhaps it was simply gratitude for that miracle that made Simon willing to allow Jesus to sit in his boat and teach. Or maybe he was too tired to come up with a reason to say ‘no.’

And when Jesus was done, perhaps Simon was hopeful that *now* he could get some sleep. Maybe the next night would be better.

But Jesus had another request. “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

I love to imagine Simon Peter’s tone of voice here.

“Master…we have worked *all night long* but we have caught **nothing**. Yet if *you* say so…I will let down the nets.”

It has generally been my experience that people who say, “if you say so” don’t always feel cause to be optimistic about the prospects of a thing working out well.

Nevertheless, the catch Jesus speaks of comes to fruition. In such an abundance that it nearly capsizes the boats.

At this point, Simon Peter realizes he’s in the presence of someone who can do far more than relieve a woman of her fever. Someone who has control over nature itself.

It’s at this point that the story begins to look an awful lot like the story of Isaiah, or the story we heard about Jeremiah last week, or the story of Moses and the burning bush. “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” In other words, “I’m unworthy of being in the presence of the Divine.”

And, just as we see in the stories of Moses, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, Simon is offered reassurance. “Don’t be afraid.”

And then he’s given a commission: “From now on, you will be catching people.”

There’s a choice to be made. Will Simon Peter choose obedience, despite not knowing where he will go or what he’ll be asked to do?

He could have come up with any of a number of excuses. There are boats full of fish. There were nets to be mended. He was tired and needed to sleep. He had a wife and a mother-in-law…and possibly children. He had a home. He had friends.

He had a *life*.

But he left behind all of it – the work, the family…the excuses. And he followed the One in whom he placed his trust.

Most of us do not get such an experience. As someone who took a long path to answer the question, “what do you want to be when you grow up,” I’ve learned that discerning the path God wants us to take often means paying attention to the things that speak most clearly to us. The things that we’re *drawn* to, fascinated by, excited about. Even if that doesn’t end up being the work we’re paid to do, it may be a part of our calling.

And make no mistake about it – each of us is called.

Each of us is called to a life of faithful obedience to God.

Each of us is called to be a part of the embodied community of believers – those who gather together for worship, fellowship, study, and service.

Each of us is given a unique set of gifts and called to use them, for both our own enjoyment and satisfaction *and* for the common good.

The calling **all of us have** is the one Jesus issued to the apostles: following Him. Even when we don’t know how it will work out. Even when we have no idea where we’ll go. But trusting that God will provide along the way.

For those of us who do not get a seraph with tongs and a hot coal or Jesus showing up at our work and saying, “Come and follow me,” it’s not always easy for us to figure out how to live out our faith. Our world is complicated and messy. We long for simple solutions to complex issues. We fail to act, convinced that we can’t make a difference.

Perhaps we turn to the teachings of the Bible for guidance. Which is a good and worthy thing to do.

Unless we turn the Bible into a mere rule book.

The Scriptures are the story of God’s faithfulness toward creation and the way humanity has responded. The things we call laws or commandments are intended to be our guidance for how to live as faithful people. But they *always* point to the One who gave those instructions. And the One who gave those instructions insists that the **primary** thing we should be concerned with is loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving ourselves.

Which means that the rules God gave us *can’t be separated from love*. They can’t be faithfully obeyed if we aren’t starting from a position of concern for the well-being of that which God created.

Over and over, in this sweeping story of God and creation, God demonstrates faithfulness to the promises God has made to humanity. God calls us to trust in those promises. And God calls us to a life rooted in that trust, demonstrated in our *agape* love for that which God has created.

Ultimately, *that’s* our calling. Finding our own way to live out our concern for the well-being of what God has created.

And what that looks like is going to be different for each of us. But it should *always* be rooted in trusting the promises of God.

Our faith is **not** in a set of rules. Our faith is in the One *those words point us to*. The One who encourages us to forgive as we are forgiven. To love as we are loved.

Our faith is in the One of whom Paul says, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Our faith is in the One who daily calls us to follow him.

Let us pray: O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen