

Luke 5:1-11
February 10, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

The last two weeks I have focused my sermon on our readings from Paul's letter to the Corinthians; however, this week I decided to return to our gospel passage because this is just such a great story as Jesus calls his first disciples. This story has it all. It's a call story and a miracle story. It's an epiphany story revealing yet again who Jesus is. It's a text about vocation. It's a story of abundance in the face of scarcity. It's a story of grace and sin. It's got doubt and fear. Awe and wonder.

Where do we even begin? We could spend an entire sermon on the abundance of fish Jesus miraculously produces in the nets of these fisherman. We could talk about how Jesus, being fully God, could have done this miracle simply standing along the lakeshore. Could he not have just commanded the sea to produce forth fish to swarm to the shore or have them leap out of the fresh water onto solid ground? But no, he chose instead to enlist the assistance of human beings. Fishermen. Even fishermen who viewed themselves unworthy to be in his presence and wished Jesus would depart their presence. Fishermen who, after a long night of fishing having caught nothing may have wondered just why Jesus was asking them to toss their nets back in the water again in broad daylight; because, all good fishermen on the Sea of Galilee knew the best time for fishing was in the darkness of the night.

Jesus borrowing Simon's boat to teach and perform a miracle and enlisting the disciples' assistance in hauling in this miraculous catch of fish is unique to Luke's rendition of this account. It's clear these additions were done to highlight the church's role in partnering with Jesus and his mission to proclaim the good news. I imagine this may have been something the young church was wrestling with following Jesus' death and ascension to be with His father.

One item especially caught my attention this week. In verse four, after climbing into Simon Peter's (aka Peter) boat, now just off the shore, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Of course, we know what happens. They go out into deeper waters and the resulting catch of fish is beyond their wildest imagination. We may say, well of course they had to go out into deeper waters as that's where the fish reside. But, as is usually the case, there is more to the story.

Undoubtedly, Jewish ears would have connected the hearing of these words with that of Genesis 1, the creation account. The very first two verses of the Hebrew Bible state, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the *deep*, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The deep, dark sea at the dawn of creation was viewed as a symbol of chaos. But God was able to bring goodness, stability, and order to even the most out-of-control and chaotic forces of the universe as God spoke and even the deep abyss obeyed and Jesus, being God, has that same power.

Our story seems to paint this as a fairly calm scene, doesn't it? Jesus gets in the boat. Simon Peter joins him. They cast out into the deep and catch a plethora of fish. But the deep for these fishermen was certainly anything but calm at times. These fishermen undoubtedly had their shares of countless nights battling the deepest part of the Sea of Galilee. Violent storms were prone to quickly descend on the Sea as they rolled over the mountain ranges guarding the perimeter. High winds would violently rush across the waters making sailing in their tiny vessels near impossible and easily capsized. Venturing out into the deepest of waters, while a necessity to providing the best opportunity for a large haul of fish, was also risky business.

But I suspect most fishermen will tell of their great love and joy of being in these deep waters and may not even trade it for anything. The adult discussion group that meets following worship has been reading and studying a series of books that looks at Jesus' life. In fact, just last week, our topic of discussion centered on the time Jesus spent around or on the Sea of Galilee. This story was one highlighted and one fisherman was interviewed. His life is lived on this sea and he has loved every bit of it. The way the color of the water changes at various times of day. The beauty of the sea and the surrounding areas. The newness each day brings. The thrill of being on the water. He couldn't imagine a better vocation.

For the last four years our family has vacationed along the Gulf of Mexico in Alabama and Florida. This is one of my “happy” places in life. In the soft white sand found along the beaches of that area with the sounds of the waves coming ashore almost lulling you to sleep. Each year, I sit and watch boat after boat venture miles from shore and then intently observe two brave individuals harnessed to a chute and cable ascend hundreds of feet high into the air. I have often considered doing this but have given into my fears. While not having experienced this first-hand I can only imagine what those who do make the trek out into the deep waters of the gulf experience. Could they not do this closer to shore, I have wondered? Why do they have to get so far out? Sure, part of it is to not kick up more wake for those frolicking in the waters along the sandy beaches but I also think there is something more beautiful that is witnessed by venturing into those deeper waters where the dolphins dance and creatures not visible from land swim. Would they miss something if they simply hugged the shoreline? Might they not encounter part of God’s grandeur that can only be witnessed by sailing out in those deepest part of the water?

But the “deep” for me, in this example, isn’t so much the waters as it is my fear of getting strapped into that harness and being hoisted hundreds of feet into the air with nothing but a thin layer of material catching the wind keeping one from plummeting into the waters below, which from that height, would be like crashing into a brick wall. And I know this fear of venturing into the “deep” is holding me back from experiencing something beautiful, wonderful, awe inspiring, and so rewarding.

And I wonder what are those “deep” places Jesus calls us to venture into that we stop and say, “I don’t think so Jesus.” Simon Peter goes, but I wonder what would have happened if he said no. Would Jesus have returned to the shore? Would Simon and the others have missed out on witnessing this miracle? Of having this encounter with the Son of God? I wonder how many things in life we miss out on because we don’t want to venture into the “deep.” We don’t want to go where Jesus wills us to go. We fall victim to complacency and comfort. We give into fear and doubt. We fail to trust Jesus is with us in the boat and will provide for us even we think all resources have dried up. We miss out on new relationships and new ways Jesus uses us to fish for people, encounter the goodness of God, and grow the kingdom.

We each have those deep places Jesus may be leading us to venture into. Our congregation may have those deep places he is leading us to go. This passage reassures us that we aren't alone. He will go with us. He will lead us. He will provide for our needs and maybe in venturing into those places we catch a new vision of who Jesus is, how he works through us, and what this beautiful kingdom He is ushering in looks like. O God give us the faith, courage, strength, and confidence to get in the boat and journey with your Son into those deep places that he calls us to go with him. Amen.