

Fishing for People
Luke 5:1-11
February 10, 2019 – Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

So here we are in the Fifth Chapter of Luke. A few weeks back we heard about Jesus baptism. We skipped over the temptations with the promise to return to those the first Sunday of Lent; and we heard of Jesus pronouncement, that “today the scriptures are fulfilled in your hearing.” Since that time, Jesus has been “bopping around Capernaum.” He’s been talking to folks, holding roadside conversations, teaching moments; and he’s healed a few sick folks simply by the power of his speech. So word is starting to get around. People are becoming interested, curious about this carpenter/teacher from Nazareth.

One day, Jesus was standing on the lakeshore, and a sizable crowd was gathering – crowding in on Jesus. So he climbed into Simon Peter’s boat, asked Peter to row just a short distance offshore so he could sit in the boat and teach those who gathered. We have no idea what Jesus said to the crowd that day. If we relate this to Mark’s Gospel, we might conclude that Jesus told the crowd several parables relating to the nature of the Kingdom of God, and how the kingdom can and will come on earth and how the kingdom will grow; but that’s Mark. Luke simply says that he taught the crowd from the boat.

Then Jesus tells Simon Peter to row out into deeper water and let down the nets. Now can’t you just imagine this scene. Jesus is a carpenter; not a fisherman; and he is trying to tell Peter, a skilled fisherman, how to fish. Peter responds, “Master, we’ve worked all night and caught nothing; but, if you insist, we’ll try again.” The first thing that strikes me is that Peter addresses Jesus as “Master.” As Luke reports it, Peter had only one prior encounter with Jesus - near the end of Chapter Four, when we’re told that Peter’s mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and the family asked Jesus to help her. Jesus spoke harshly to the fever and it left her. Yes, that witness may have been enough to call Jesus “Master” and to follow the carpenter’s request albeit reluctantly.

And, of course, you know the rest of the story. They had a miraculous catch. They filled two boats to almost sinking. Peter tells Jesus that he’s a sinner, and not worthy to stand before him. Then there is James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Peter’s partners. They too were amazed. And then comes “the call.” Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Don’t be afraid. From now on you will be fishing for people.” And they left *everything* and followed him.

One of the things is clear about this passage: With Jesus there is change. Peter thought he knew the way the world worked. Peter, the fisherman, had caught nothing; and he certainly didn’t expect to catch anything when Jesus told him to “try again.” But Jesus said just that: “Try again!” Even when Peter resisted, Jesus

said “Try again,” and in so doing, he lead Peter into a fuller, richer, more abundant experience. I note that Peter did not simply get a new catch. Peter got a whole new life. The call of Peter completely changed his life. He abandoned his occupation; he abandoned his livelihood; he abandoned all his belongings to follow Christ. Indeed Peter’s life changed and it would never be the same again.

There’s a lesson in this. Our past “sins,” our past failures, our past behavior does not preclude the power of God making changes in our lives. God calls us, and God changes us. Indeed, God offers new opportunities, new experiences. And so I ask, “Where are the deep waters of your life?” Where is God sending you to realize the abundance that God has in store for you. What are the areas where you have been tempted to give up when God has said “Try again.”

And friends, yes, I’m speaking to you as individuals; but I’m also speaking to you as a congregation, to you as a community, to you as the family of God. A few weeks back, we spent some time after church reviewing *Our Faithful Journey*, this church’s long range plan; and I truly believe it is a plan that is inspired by God and lead by the Holy Spirit. I am thrilled to see this plan move forward. I believe our Guiding Principles are 100% in keeping with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I note that our Guiding Principles are printed every week in your bulletin; they are on our website and in our newsletter; and I have a copy posted over my desk as a constant reminder. I hope you are also reading them regularly. I also note that our Guiding Principles, and even our programs for 2019 leave a lot of room for you as individuals and you as smaller groups to “answer the call,” to let some nets down in newer deeper water.

Yes, I’ve said a lot of this before; and we’ve made some significant progress. But still, it’s easy to say, “We’ve fished all night and haven’t caught anything.” But Jesus is saying, “Try again, try again, try again.” We must keep fishing, fishing for the unchurched people, fishing for the people who really need to hear the good news of God’s amazing love, fishing for the people who are trying to fill the voids in their lives with all the wrong things.

But perhaps more than that, we need to fish for the people whose lives are filled with hatred instead of love. We need to fish for the people who honestly believe the lies built on racism, sexism, poverty, and all the other issues that divide us. And we need to fish for the victims of racism, and sexism, and poverty, and all the other things that divide us.

All too often, we are afraid to get out into the deep water. What if a storm comes up? What if we capsize? What if we fall overboard? I tell you, it’s the “what if’s” that hinder growth in the Kingdom of God. And all too often, the “what if’s” keep us from the deep water. Too often the “what if’s” cause us to leave our boats tied up at the dock.

But this church has a chart – a map to the deep water. It says:

We invest in our youth.
We serve our neighbors.
We provide opportunities for people to grow in faith.
We welcome and nurture a diverse congregation.
We foster lasting relationships.

Folks, let us put out into the deep water. Let us follow the call of all who have gone before. Let us leave the things that don't matter behind as we follow the risen Christ, as we fish for people in the name of the triune God.

Let us pray. . .

Lord,
In the midst of struggles and difficulties,
may we hear your words to try again;
and, may we follow your call into deeper waters
that we may fish for people,
leading people everywhere
into a deeper and fuller relationship with you.
Amen.

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