

Out in Deep Water

Luke 5:1-11
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Over the past several weeks we've heard stories from the Gospel of Luke about Jesus' identity, his mission, and how his hometown synagogue folks rejected him after they hear Jesus wasn't going to give them preferential treatment. After learning about the launch of Jesus' public ministry we turn today to Jesus' calling disciples to join the mission.

There's an entire genre of biblical literature commonly known as call stories. For instance, in the Old Testament God calls to Abraham and Sarah, to Moses, to Deborah, to the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. And in the New Testament there's a call to Zechariah and Elizabeth, to Mary and Joseph, to John the Baptist, to Peter, Paul, and others. **There's a commonality found in most call stories. They typically begin with reluctance, because the task seems impossible or the person feels inept, or both.** We've just heard Isaiah's call story. Hear, now, Simon Peter's call story.

[Read Luke 5:1-11]

Isaiah, confronted with Divine glory in the heavenly temple, and believing himself to be "unclean" among "unclean people", initially withdraws, saying, "Woe is me! I am lost!" (Isa 6:5). Isaiah eventually responds with the familiar, "Here I am, Lord, send me," now a popular hymn we will sing in a few moments. And likewise, Simon Peter, confronted with Divine glory in Jesus and believing himself to be unworthy, falls at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). **What both of these men shared in common was not a lack of trust in God or Jesus. Rather, it was a lack of faith in themselves, in their own capacities and worth.** More on that in a moment, and how that connects with our experiences.

During my first semester at seminary, there was a special class for the incoming students when each of us had the opportunity to share our own sense of God's call into ministry. Almost to a person, it included a good bit of fear and trepidation. The same is often true when a person in a congregation is called to serve by being ordained and installed as a ruling elder on the session. **God's call to ministry and mission, however, isn't limited to those in leadership positions in a community of faith. God's call is to everyone. That call isn't about hierarchy, prestige, or privilege - it's about different gifts for differing forms of service.** Therefore, in one way or another, **each one of us is involved in discerning God's call upon our lives.**

Let's look, then, at what we can discover from the story of Jesus' call to Simon Peter, and how we might apply what we learn to ourselves, individually and as a community of faith. Luke tells one heck of a fishing story. But it's even more amazing when looked through the lens of its purpose for the gospel writer. For **this becomes not just a story that happened once upon a time, but rather happens all the time, to this very day, including to you and me. For Luke, this story is about discipleship, about being called to ministry and service, and how you and I choose to respond.**

I want to present **three observations** that can be made regarding our calling into discipleship. **First, the fishermen had done nothing to warrant or merit Jesus' call to them.** Regardless of what Jesus may have seen in them, to contend that he called the most capable or most qualified to be his disciples would contradict an important element in the Gospel narrative. The fishermen had no training for this new line of work of fishing for people, of evangelism. They were ordinary working folks. We have no indication that they were called because of their qualifications, character, or even potential.

Again, both Isaiah's and Simon Peter's initial reaction was an overwhelming feeling of being unworthy, to the point of acknowledging their own sinfulness. Therefore, **it should be a source of comfort and reassurance to know that we – you and I – don't have to possess what we think is the 'right stuff' (like a perfect life or expert biblical knowledge or public speaking ability) before God can use us to further God's kingdom in our midst.** Remember this mantra:

- **God doesn't call those who are empowered, God empowers those who are called.**

Second, Jesus' call to discipleship did not come in a holy place, like the temple or a synagogue, but in the midst of the fishermen's ordinary daily work. This point is significant because it is a further sign of the ordinary work of God's realm, Jesus' new beloved community, that reaches into the arena of everyday human life. **God comes to us, including from within us, and calls to us in the midst of the ordinariness of our everyday lives.** The ministry begun by Jesus, therefore, involves us wherever we find ourselves, and at whatever we are doing. **Discipleship is everywhere, all the time.** It's not just a Sunday morning kind of thing.

And that leads us to the **third** point, that **the call to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus may require a change in our priorities and a reordering of our commitments.** As we are often reminded, discipleship comes with a cost. We're told that the first disciples made the dramatic decision to leave everything and follow Jesus. While it's understandable that we don't like to be told what our priorities should be and how we should live our lives, it is true that at one level serving God in our daily lives *does* require a commitment on our part, and at another level, it may require a change in some of our priorities. Perhaps we, like so many biblical characters, are afraid. Yet at other times we, like Isaiah, may gather the courage to respond, **"Here am I, send me."**

One more quick point. It is here that this fishing story can continue to be instructive. Where is it that Jesus tells Simon Peter to go to catch fish? Jesus says, **"Put out into the deep water."** Luke meant this to have a **metaphorical meaning** beyond its literal understanding. We often use the current phrase, "Jump into the deep end of the pool."

What does it mean for you and I, for us as a community of faith, to head out into deep water? **Deep water means moving beyond the safety, security, familiarity, and comfort of the shallow water near the shoreline.** Perhaps the Spirit of God is calling you right now to leave the shallow places in your life and head out to explore the depths. Yes, **there is risk in leaving what is familiar and comfortable, even traditional.** It takes trust and courage to go just a little bit deeper, to where things aren't so certain, to where we can't see what lies beneath, to where things are going to be different.

What deeper water are you being called to explore? Perhaps it's going deeper within yourself. Perhaps it's deeper into progressive theology and biblical interpretation.

What deeper water is College Hill being called to venture into? Perhaps at this moment it involves supporting the separation of church and state, including current issues with immigration. We have been in deep water before, especially in the area of social justice, and we will continue to do so. Anti-racism work, for example, is something many of us have discerned to be more actively engaged.

Like that miraculous catch of fish, **what abundance might be waiting** if you and I were to risk heading out from the shallow end into deeper uncharted territory, and there let down our nets? And notice that Simon Peter couldn't do it all by himself. He had to call his friends, his partners, to help. We learn **we need to share the labor, so that our nets don't break and our boat doesn't sink**. This work and ministry, especially when it's out in deep water, is something we do together, in community.

And when you find yourself out in deep water know, first of all, that God is there *with you, within you, and for you*.

Here I am, Lord. Send me.

Here we are, Lord. Send us.

Amen.

Resources:

SALT Commentary for Epiphany Week Five, saltproject.org, 1-31-22.

Teri McDowell Ott, Looking Into the Lectionary – 5th Sunday after Epiphany, *The Presbyterian Outlook*, pres-outlook.org, 1-31-22.