

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Paul delivers in a nutshell the story of the gospel that was given to him. In the lineage of the Christian faith, we have received the good news of God's love from generations of believers before us, and we continue to tell this story to the world.

1Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

3For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Luke 5:1-11

Jesus' teaching of God's word has begun to draw great crowds. For Simon, James, and John, Jesus' teaching inspires hospitality, then obedience, and then risk. After Jesus' creative power is revealed, fear and amazement leads these three fishermen to leave everything behind to become apostles.

1Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:1-11

Today we are taking a break from the snow and ice that surrounds us and travel in our minds to the Sea of Galilee, in Gennesaret. The breeze is cool coming off the lake, it tempers the oppressive warmth of all the people who are gathered here on this very warm day, with the sun beating down on us, waiting for the man who teaches in such an inspiring way to begin. There are so many people pressing down toward him, he has climbed into a boat to make some space for himself. He's sitting down now, ready to begin his message.

It was such an inspiring message, people are still here, waiting for him to come back to the shore so they can greet him, so they can stay near to this man who is so impressive. But

wait... he's not coming into the shore... it looks like he's telling Simon to go out to fish again. It looks like Simon may be giving him a bit of a hard time, after all, they were out all night fishing. But I don't think they caught anything. There they go, they're throwing their nets into the water. Wow! Look at that! There are so many fish in those nets they can't hold them in their boat... look that other boat who had gone back out with them is coming near to help them. Their boat is full too! Both of those boats are so full they are starting to sink... Wow!

Now I'm hearing voices carry over the water. I hear Simon telling this man to go away... Simon doesn't think he's good enough to be in this man's presence. I think Simon might be afraid of him. James and John are there with him, surely together they... Wait! I hear this man saying, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching people." I wonder what he means by that... it certainly seems to have calmed Simon and his partners. Here they come into the shore... it's going to take them forever to get those fish taken care of and their nets mended. There's not quite so many people here now, maybe those who are still here will pitch in and help them out. They've landed now. Wait! They aren't unloading their boats. They're walking off with the teacher! Well, we can't leave these fish to rot... let's go offer to help the crew take care of them. Maybe we can all share in the bounty.

It seems as though every time I preach on this gospel reading the emphasis has always been on being fishers of people, and how we are to go out and gather them in. Although I still think that's a good topic, it isn't where I'm going this morning. This morning I want to talk about the abundance of God. Did you hear how Simon Peter and his partners James and John followed Jesus? Why? Because they saw a miracle before their very eyes, knew they weren't worthy to stand in the presence of someone with that kind of power, yet this person Jesus not only assured them it was ok for them to be in his presence, he wanted them to be traveling partners. With this kind of an invitation how could they not just leave everything behind and go with him? No second thought. No, "Wait Jesus, we need to take care of the catch, repair the nets, get the boat ready to go out again." They simply followed without considering the cost of what they were leaving behind, somehow knowing that where they were headed was going to be far more fulfilling than the life of a fisherman.

Thinking about it this way makes the first disciples seem a little irresponsible. They just walked away without making any provision for the catch, the boat, their businesses. Well, maybe not... because James and John the sons of Zebedee and they were partners perhaps Zebedee was left to take care of everything. When I was in Israel, I saw a boat that was like the one that Simon would have been fishing from. It would take more than one man to sail it. So, yes, there were others on the boats to get them unloaded, the fish taken care of and the nets mended, ready to go out again that evening. Could it be that knowing he was taking three of their working men Jesus provided a large enough catch to cover the cost of hiring men to replace those whom he took away?

God does that, right? God provides for us so that when we feel as though there isn't any more to give, when we've done all we can do, when it seems almost hopeless, we find that God gives us the strength to do what needs to be done. Where have you seen this happen in your life? Maybe you had a really hard day, nothing went the way it was supposed to go, you're ready to just sit down and try again tomorrow when you remember you told someone that you'd help them with something this evening. It's something that can't be put off, you want to keep your word, so you just pull together all the strength you have and go to your friend's

house. On your way you pray for patience and strength. Surprisingly, not only was the project completed, you find that you actually enjoyed doing it and you feel refreshed. What if you had gone to your friend's home with the attitude that you really didn't want to be there, that this was just a bother that you could do without, and that the whole thing was just a waste of time? Do you think you'd have the same sense of accomplishment and feeling of refreshment? Most likely not. When we invite God into our situation we find that God provides.

What if the apostle Paul, after being thrown off his donkey and seeing Jesus, had grudgingly decided to do what was expected of him? Do you think he'd have had many converts to the faith? Do you think we'd have all the letters of encouragement that make up a good deal of the New Testament? Do you think he'd be writing from prison? Because Paul accepted what Jesus gave to him, the ability to embrace the good news of Jesus' deliverance from sin, and to not dutifully, but joyfully, spread that to as many people as he could reach, we have the abundance of all the persons who listened to what Paul taught. Because Paul taught with such conviction they too were convinced that this was important, that what he was saying was something that would improve their lives.

We may not find God's abundance in material possessions. It may be that God's abundance is found in joyful obedience. In having an attitude that embraces Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Yet, God's sense of abundance isn't limited to what we can imagine. God does the unexpected. Like multiply loaves and fishes. Like rescue a man who was thrown into the lion's den because of his unwillingness to deny his belief in God. Like allowing 3 men to walk away from their life's work because they have been touched by a miracle. Like bringing us together with others who have been drawn into God's presence to know God's abundance and to discern how we can allow that abundance to overflow into the lives of others. God loves a cheerful giver. One can never outgive God.

All glory be to God.