

Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 5:1-11
Psalm 138

We live in scarcity in 20th century America. It's not the lack of food...although that's a scarcity for more of us than we would like to acknowledge. It's not the scarcity of housing, although there are far too many of our brothers and sisters who go to sleep each night without adequate shelter from the elements. We live in scarcity in 20th century America. Our closets are bursting at the seams, and yet we "don't have a thing to wear!" and we throw in landfills thousands of pounds of usable clothing because we want something new. We have electronic equipment that has gone out of fashion or been replaced by something faster and smoother with more power than the electronic equipment we have. We don't know how to dispose of it, but eventually we find a way to get it out of the house so it's no longer our problem. We live in scarcity in 20th century America. So why is it that there are 191 channels on my television set, but there's not one thing that I would like to watch? We have short attention spans in 20th century America. What pleased us or amused us or engaged us six months ago is no longer satisfying and we're looking around for some other kind of entertainment that will. We know all about scarcity and abundance in this country. We have both...and yet we always seem to be scanning the horizon for the next exciting, entertaining, luxurious thing that will amuse us. We're always interested in whatever is "the latest." And it rarely ever occurs to us that these feelings of vague dissatisfaction...of longing for something we don't have...of complacency even in the midst of plenty...have little to do with the world outside our own skins, our own minds, and our own hearts. These longings have been around as long as man has walked the earth and they always leave us feeling a bit empty and unsatisfied.

Certainly in the last eighteen months, we have all discovered what is really important to us. We long for a sense of safety. We want to know that the likelihood of our contracting a lethal disease is actually small....but at the moment it isn't. It looms large around everywhere. At the moment, the lethal little germ lies around every corner and under every rock; every door handle; and even every handshake. It's a bit unnerving. Our social lives have come to a screeching halt and we miss being in person with our friends and family. Isolation is not good for us. Many fantasies of catastrophes loom large in our imaginations when we don't have much to distract us. Although all of these restrictions and fears seem to be very new to us, they really aren't. These situations have been occurring and reoccurring for many centuries.

We were given some important messages this morning in our scripture readings...important messages about the power of Jesus Christ and the providence of Almighty God. The themes in all three of our texts this morning were around trust...call to discipleship...abundance...discouragement...risk...and persistence. These are all relevant themes for the rhythms of our lives right now...right now in the challenging time of this pandemic that is all around us and will not go away and leave us in peace.

Jesus has come to teach us about the nature of God and to create for us experiences that will help us understand the meaning of God. Jesus spends some time in a boat slightly offshore where he teaches the throngs of people who have followed him. When he's done and he gets out of the boat, he is met by an exhausted and discouraged Simon Peter. All night long, he and the fishermen with him, have been lowering their nets into the water and time after time the nets are coming up empty. Peter knows what it feels like to be bone tired and discouraged. He's going to have to return home empty-handed for his family and his village and he must be feeling pretty defeated. Without a word of sympathy, understanding or encouragement, Jesus tells him to take the boat out again and this time go to the center of the lake where the water is the deepest. Peter balks because he's been out there all night and he knows there's nothing there. Jesus is insistent but Peter and the others finally and reluctantly get back in their boats and go out into the deep water.

How many times does Jesus ask us to go back out into the deep water? How many times does Jesus ask us to do something that we have no interest in doing? How many times does Jesus send us back out into the world when we are bone weary and discouraged? More than we realize in all likelihood. And how many times has Jesus asked us to continue trying even though we've met with no success so far? We could argue with Jesus all night...and sometimes we do! When we've already been slammed by failure...when we've already been disappointed...when we know that we don't have the right strategy or enough numbers to make something work, it's easy to be discouraged and to feel like our lack of success is all our fault. Well, some of it may be, but we all know that when we commit ourselves and our work into God's hands, strange and wonderful things can and do happen. Jesus is here to show us the nature of God that includes God's abundance towards us...God's love for us...God's willingness to stay with us even in the deep water...even when we are afraid...even when we have no confidence in ourselves. God provides in the most spectacular ways as long as we are willing to pick up our nets...even when we are bone tired...to get in our boats even when we think it's no use...to drop our nets into the deep water even though we've tried that again and again and again with no success.

The deep water can be terrifying. It can be daunting and discouraging. It can also hold the abundance that God has prepared for us. We can't give up. We can't stay on shore because we are tired. How could God ever share his faithfulness and his love for us if we aren't willing to

trust? Getting back in the boat was not only an act of resignation for Peter, it was also an act of trust.

We know what it feels like to be tired and discouraged. We know how easy it is to give up on something that we've dreamed about for years. But the final decision is not up to us. We need only to do as Jesus asks us to do...to petition God for blessings and energy and renewed spirit...and a sense of hope and good will. God will not abandon us. God will not leave us out in the deep water to drift aimlessly with no hope in sight. That's not what Jesus taught us about God.

Jesus' mentioning of the "deep water" implies that there may be unexplored areas of potential beyond perceived limits of resources, knowledge, and energy. The response to this willingness is immediate; suddenly they have more fish than two boats can bear.

The themes in this text around trust, call, discipleship, abundance, discouragement, risk, and persistence are always relevant but have particular resonance during this challenging pandemic time.¹