

St. James UCC Havertown, PA
February 10, 2019 | Luke 5:1-11
Rev. Emily Garcia Livingston | “A Call to Discipleship”

Today’s Gospel passage is known by many as the call of the first disciples -- Peter, James, and John. These scriptures have a very different tone from last week’s verses which began with Jesus being praised by his own people in Nazareth as He read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, to these very same people becoming enraged by his words and seeking to kill him by throwing him off of a cliff.

It’s important for us to see what happened in Luke’s gospel between where we left off last week in the lectionary readings to where we are today. After Jesus managed to miraculously evade the angry mob, He went down to Capernaum and taught in the synagogue. People were astonished with his teachings and the authority in which He proclaimed the Word of God. Rumors were growing about Jesus after He healed a man, in the synagogue, who was possessed by a demon. This miracle no doubt spreads his name and his works throughout the entire region.

In the midst of this, a crowd of people is growing. They are following Jesus every step of the way to witness his works. Somehow, Jesus learns that Simon Peter’s mother-in-law is very sick, so He goes to the home and heals her. He commands the fever to leave her body and at once, the woman arises to serve Jesus and her family.

After this miracle, people began bringing before Jesus all of their sick loved ones to be healed. He touched every one of these people and healed them. After this, the crowd attempted to stop Jesus from leaving their town but He told them that He must preach the Word of God in other cities as well. And then, He leaves to preach in the synagogues of Galilee.

The crowds didn’t stop pursuing Jesus and it is here where our reading from today begins. Jesus decides to preach to the crowd from the lake and He walks to Simon Peter’s boat and asks Peter to take him away from the shore by a little bit. Once he gets far enough away from the shore, Jesus begins teaching the crowd. When he finishes teaching the crowd, Jesus turns His attention to Peter.

Now, Peter is a fisherman. Fishing is his area of expertise and how he made a living. Jesus is known by many as Mary and Joseph’s son and a carpenter of sorts, like his earthly father. We don’t have many details about the work Jesus did as a carpenter but we can surmise that he is some sort of tradesman. We have no reason to assume

that he was a fisherman, like Peter. And as far as Peter was concerned, Jesus was no fisherman.

So when Jesus tells Peter to take Him further into the deep and to put out the nets so that they can catch fish, Peter must have been thinking, Who is this dude...this guy is nuts...he doesn't know what he's talking about. We've been out here all night and we haven't caught anything, and on top of that, the hour is late. I'm exhausted, and we're not going to catch any fish. But instead of saying all of this, Peter is respectful. And He replies by first saying: Master.

Calling Jesus *Master* is demonstrating respect. It's Peter's way of saying that he recognizes that Jesus is a man with authority. And this was likely because Peter personally heard Jesus' teachings and he was aware of how Jesus healed his own mother-in-law. This was a noteworthy response of Peter because as a Jewish man, he did not worship as the pagans worshipped and using the term "Master" to address another man was not done loosely.

But Peter wasn't really aware of who Jesus was at this moment. So he replies, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet** if you say so, I will let down the nets." I wonder what made Peter stop in his tracks of reluctance and say, "Yet, if you say so." Was there an internal spark that encouraged him to go along with what Jesus said? Was it something he had just heard Jesus teach about that made him open? Had the Holy Spirit pricked his heart to set Peter up for the blessing that was about to follow? Did Peter have a gut feeling to stop objecting and resisting and to just follow Jesus' instructions?

What a blessing indeed follows. So many fish get caught in the nets that the nets begin to burst. The other fishermen come to help Peter with their boat, and there are so many fish that both boats begin to sink under the sheet weight of all of the fish they caught.

And it is at this moment that it all *sinks in* for Peter. It is at this moment that Peter recognizes who Jesus is. It is at this moment, that Peter calls Jesus "Lord" -- signifying Peter's belief that Jesus is the Christ. It is at this moment that Peter recognizes his own sinfulness in the presence of God's holiness. In this moment, Peter "gets it."

Although Peter is not perfect and he has a few moments where his faith in Christ falters, he's one of the first disciples to "get it" and the one whom Jesus says, "from now on you will catch people." This encounter with Peter changed his life forever and

when they went back to shore, Peter, James, and John leave everything and follow Jesus.

Peter's experience with Jesus brought about this life-changing confession that brought Peter to his knees before Jesus saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" This confession demonstrated Peter's understanding that he was but a human being and a sinner. It was a confession where Peter admits that he doubted Jesus' instruction to throw down the nets to catch fish.

This is also Peter's confession that Jesus is Holy and Almighty God. Peter recognizes that he is in the presence of the Holy One and he is not worthy to stand before Him. Peter's confession declares that Jesus is due his worship and praise. Jesus notes that Peter's confession was also one of great reverence and fear when Jesus tells him "Do not be afraid, from now on you will catch people."

Peter's call story brings to mind the themes from the January series, Life in the Light. We talked about being obedient and demonstrating humility as ways that enable us to walk in the light of Christ. We also talked about trusting God and spending time with God. Although Peter resisted Christ's instruction at first, Peter ultimately obeyed what Jesus told him to do. Peter also humbled himself before God in two ways; he was willing to take instructions about fishing from a person whom he thought wasn't a fisherman by trade and he got down on his knees before Jesus when he witnessed the miracle of all of the fish they caught. Peter knew at this moment that Jesus was the Son of God and he could not deny what he saw and felt.

Peter trusted Jesus when he stopped objecting and let down the nets. Peter also left everything to follow Jesus and in doing this, he spent time with God and trusted God. In our busy lives, most of us can't imagine leaving everything behind to follow Jesus and yet we see in various call stories of prophets and disciples that they did just that. Despite their human failings these brothers and sisters in the faith ultimately answered God's call with "Here I Am." In other words, they answered affirmatively with "I hear you God and I'm willing to be used of you."

How are we responding to God's call today? Are we full of objections and reservations like Peter was initially? Are we not willing to "fish" in new ways? Are we leaving room for the Spirit of God to gently nudge us to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us? Are we terrified of what we hear God telling us to do?

Each of us has a call -- that thing that we were created to do to help build the Kingdom of God on Earth. And God has called each of us to follow Christ, to become disciples, and to make disciples. This passage reminds me that Christ is the one who calls not only us but also the fish to overflow the nets. God's nature is abundance and God's desire is that a massive number of people respond to God's call; so much so that the nets break from the weight of all those who answer.

I believe that somebody prayed for you and for me. Somebody sought God's face for you and for me that we would come to see and understand who Jesus really is. And like Peter, once we heard Jesus' call, we answered. And just like Jesus went to Peter's boat to initiate a life-changing dialogue with Peter, Jesus initiated a life-changing relationship with all of us. He's always reaching out for us and patiently waiting for us to respond. Jesus' first act towards being in relationship with us is when He repaired the breach that existed between God and all of humanity when He died for us that we could have eternal life.

Christ's call may come as a gentle whisper or as a voice that we hear clearly. Christ's call may come at a time when we least expect it; it can come when we're exhausted and frustrated, like Peter was, or when we're energized and feeling encouraged in our spirit. Whenever it comes, Christ's call to discipleship requires us to spend time with God; to learn God's word and to teach others God's word; and to demonstrate God's love to all people through our actions and deeds. It also requires an answer to a basic question -- will we follow Him or not??

Christ commands us to carry out the "great commission."

19 - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 - and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt 28:19-20)

As we carry out the great commission, let us trust Christ to teach us how to fish in new ways; let us trust Christ to draw an abundance of fish to our nets; let us answer Christ's call with "Here I am"; and let us always remember, even in the midst of our deepest fears, that Christ has promised to be with us, as we follow Him.

To God be the glory!