

Luke 5: 1-11 “Out in Deep Water” Rev. Janet Chapman 2/02/2025

Jeremy had tried everything to cure his bad case of smelly feet. To make matters worse, his wedding day was fast approaching and he was concerned his smelly feet would ruin his marriage once his bride found out. So Jeremy asked his dad what he should do. His father said, “No problem. All you have to do is never take off your shoes until right before bed, and then always put on new clean socks and wear those to bed.” Loving his fiancé so very much, he agreed to try. Ironically, his bride-to-be, Sara, had a similar fear she had not shared with Jeremy. She decided to ask her mother. “Mom, when I wake up in the morning, my breath is truly awful. I’ve tried all sorts of mouth rinses before bed but nothing seems to work.” The mom tried to console her by saying, “Everybody has bad breath in the morning.” Sara protested, “You don’t understand. My morning breath is so bad, I’m afraid our marriage will fail because he won’t want to sleep in the same room with me.” Her mother said, “Try this – in the morning get straight out of bed and head for the bathroom to brush your teeth.” “I shouldn’t even say good morning?” asked Sara. “Not a word,” said the mom. Well it’s worth a try, thought Sara. The couple were married and remembering the parental advice they had received, Jeremy was relentless with changing his socks and Sara kept her morning silence. They managed quite well until about six months later. Shortly before dawn one morning, Jeremy awoke with a start to find that one of his socks had come off. Fearful of the consequences, he frantically searched the bed. This, of course, woke up Sara with a start, and without thinking, she blurted out, “What on earth are you doing?” “Oh no,” he said in a panic, “I think you’ve swallowed one of my socks!”

Failure and the fear of failure are nemeses in our lives, and thus today’s Gospel story is for anyone who can relate. The disciples have been fishing all night long; they have caught nothing. Jesus tells them, “Put out into the deep water, let down your nets for a catch.” Peter informs Jesus, “But Master, we’ve been working all night long and haven’t caught anything... but if you say so, we’ll give it a try.” And they caught so many fish that they thought the net would break. Will Willimon reminds us that for most of us, that is the end of the story –

we stop at verse 6. After a night of fishing failure, isn't it wonderful that when the fishermen did what Jesus asked, going out into deep water, they had such success? If at first you don't succeed, try, try again, right? And well we should, because if you have ever spent much time around the church, you know there's enough failure to go around. Jesus has called you and me to be "fishers of people." "Follow me," he promises his disciples, "I'll teach you how to catch people." So much is asked of the church, of parents, of educators, of household heads, and yet we have so little to show for our efforts. Master, we've been working all night long and we've caught nothing. I've been tutoring this kid for 2 years now, and he is still flunking math; I've tried everything I can think of to get my kid to do her chores, with no success; I write and call my congress leaders again and again on behalf of the people God names as "the least of these," and still those people get trampled upon; I've tried to quit smoking before and it never worked; I keep paying off my debts and more get added on, what's the use? So we stop at verse 6, the verse about success, and now we can all go home on this cold, rainy February morning less depressed than when we got here.

But God says "Hold on, just a minute friend. There's more to the story." The story of Jesus' fishing trip doesn't end simply with a great catch of fish. Along comes verse 8: "But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' feet saying, 'Get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful person!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken in." Willimon asks, "Why would Peter say that? "Get away from me, Jesus, I'm a sinful person!"? You would think he would have been delighted with this huge catch of fish after a futile night. If you don't know why Peter said such a thing, then you don't know about the dangers of fishing out in deep water with Jesus. Let's be honest, there's something about us that knows how to handle the failures of fishing, something that wouldn't be too bothered if the story ended with empty boats returning to shore. After all, you don't have to clean those stinky fish if you don't catch any. Something about us understands and is comfortable with fishing all night long without a bite, being in church all day long with little to show for it, living life just getting by without really making a difference in the world around

us. The reality is that we are complacent with failure, we understand it, we are content with Good Friday... but we are scared half out of our wits by Easter.

When Joanne Gasser came to the Outreach team 8 years ago about the possibility of feeding the unsheltered at the Hope Van, I was skeptical. We are just a small group of folks. We already do what we can for those in need. After all, we sponsor an apartment and activities at Francis Court and a booth at the Pride Festival. Isn't that enough? We are struggling to make our budget, the economy isn't great, church people are dying and moving way- do we dare take on one more thing? But we gave it a try. Food started pouring in, people volunteered to serve, hand out essentials, socks and gloves, even sit down at the breakfast table and talk with people as relationships blossomed beyond just a once-a-month event. But some wandered if it was doing any good? There are too many hungry people and we are just a handful of folks; there is too much hurt, too many disappointments, nothing will really change. We can handle Good Friday, but Easter is scary business with its deep waters of God's unmanageable, mysterious, and powerful grace. It makes us want to cry, "I am a sinful person, get out of here Jesus, I am not worthy." In the face of life over death, success over failure, we are humbled. We don't even know how to respond to such things. The church was changing and some began to grumble, "You know I liked it better when we just kept it simple, predictable, safe...it's not the same church anymore." To which Jesus responded, "Come on out in the deep water, cast your nets."

It was too much water that destroyed portions of Redding's black AME church in town, and when they reached out for help, we responded. Even without connections or any previous relationships, we gave it a try, casting out our nets into deep water and giving it our best shot. What we gave was so minor compared to what we were given as we experienced their faith in the face of great devastation. Then came the Carr fire and we opened our doors to evacuees, complete strangers with pets no less, and later to mission trips coming to assist with recovery efforts. None of us knew what we were doing, never happened before, and it seemed that the most secure move would be to simply stay in the

shallow end. As if that never-before-incident wasn't enough, then came the pandemic and some wandered if we should retreat to the shores, where it was safe. Then came the intervention of the Health Dept. into the deep waters of the Hope Van who said no more home-cooked meals. Some said, "Well that's it – we tried but we are in over our heads." But Jesus prodded, "Come out in the deep water, cast your nets." Providing food became less personal, but it didn't cease at the Hope Van. But a new challenge made itself blatantly known and failure had a tight grip, this time in the area of housing – low-income senior housing and microshelters. Apparently, there was more than one way to cast out nets, more than one way to build relationships and support God's most vulnerable.

The waters are deep these days... we don't know what will become of the parking lot traffic because of Piper Way apartments, we are being asked to provide home-cooked meals and sit at the table with GoodWater microshelter residents and the Health Dept can't intervene this time, Alcoholics Anonymous is seeking more meeting space for their growing population, Western Service Workers is making a thousand tamales in our kitchen with profits benefitting the poorest workers, LGBTQ+ folks are finding a place of refuge and advocacy, 4-legged canine friends are bringing their partners for training, and so on. It's just not the same church, some say. Our newer folks don't realize the change, but what they do express to me again and again is it is clear to them that they want to be out in these deep waters with us. Personally, friends, I will tell you it's a lot easier to stay on the shore, in the shallows, not feeling adequate enough to address head on the issues that harm God's vulnerable, not sure of our next move, if we move at all for fear of being noticed. Resistance is all around us and sometimes people ask me, "What gave you the idea to try something like this?" I've struggled to know how to answer, but I read something that said it for me. "None of this was my idea – it never is. Why on earth would I want to make my job, or your jobs as God's people for that matter, any harder than they already are? This is God's idea of a good time, not mine." Jesus says, "Come on out in the deep water, cast your nets." It's tempting to say, "Get out of here, Jesus," but Jesus just responds, "I'm going to teach you to catch people... or I'll die trying."