

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

February 13, 2022, The 5th Sunday of Epiphany

Psalm 1; Luke 5: 1-11

**BETWEEN EXHAUSTION AND THE DEEP
A SERMON ON SIMPLE FAITH IN *** TIMES**

The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber

In my first preaching class in seminary our professors asked us all to preach our first sermon on the story of Zacchaeus; 100 seminarians all preaching on the same thing. We grumbled to each other that it was going to be really boring when we preached to our precept groups of 9 other students. Who wanted to listen to the same thing 10 times? But on the day when we gathered together to preach, we learned an amazing lesson. People from New York, Georgia, Korea, Texas, the Northwest, and other parts of the country, all with very different life stories, all heard this story of Zacchaeus differently, and we preached on it very differently. We heard 10 very unique sermons that day.

Last week I preached on Luke 5: 1-11. Later in the week I read this sermon you are going to hear this morning, written by the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber. This has been a rough week for long covid symptoms and I knew I would need to use someone else's words this morning. So, although you just heard a sermon on Luke 5: 1-11 last week, you are going to hear a very different sermon this morning. The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber is a Lutheran pastor; you heard another one of her sermons a couple weeks ago. This is what she has to say about Luke 5:1-11:

Nadia writes: This week I started to admire Peter as a person of faith.

And here's why: because at least he was honest.

...he (Jesus) said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.

You see, if, as the text says, he was cleaning his nets, he was done. He had practically already gotten home for the night and put on his sweatpants and poured himself a drink. He was DONE.

And - I imagine, he was exhausted. Exhausted by prolonged effort met only with failure. We've been fishing all night and caught nothing, he says to Jesus.

I've always focused on the abundant catch of fish part of this text, but this week I couldn't stop thinking about this part of the text. A part I never really noticed, but maybe that's because I never preached this story as the world entered into the third year of a global pandemic.

See, I don't know about you, but I also am exhausted.

I've gone through all the same stages of this thing that you have. The initial creativity of lock down in March 2 years ago, the fun ZOOM happy hours with friends, the newfound love of baking. The comfort of wearing yoga pants all day. The inordinate amount of TV.

Then the growing social isolation. The malaise.

Then the hope of vaccines. The competitive scrambling to find Vaccine appointments, the joy of ripping those masks off and traveling again, that lasted about 45 minutes before DELTA. The effort we've all had to make to balance staying safe but also staying mentally healthy, the endless masking and testing and anxiety, the endless disappointments, the endless Covid symptoms

I'm EXHAUSTED.

... Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.

I'm exhausted and if I'm honest, I do not want to go into the deep, thank you very much. I want to stay near the comfort of the shore, I just finished cleaning my nets and am ready for my pajamas and Netflix. I want to stay close to the shore Jesus, because I know that in the Hebrew scriptures, The Deep is where chaos and the unknown reside.

But this week I started to realize that maybe we aren't at the shore people anymore anyhow and maybe we haven't been for a very long time. In this text, we aren't a curious crowd just a few comfortable meters from home listening on the hill to Jesus.

We are Peter somewhere between exhaustion and the deep, trying to still have faith while:

The economy is chaotic.

Our healthcare system is teetering.

And for the last two years any human being standing near us may kill us with their breath – breath - the thing all those meditation teachers tell us to "pay attention to" like that will save us - we now have to pay attention to because it might actually kill us.

So here, today, in this place between exhaustion and the deep, I'll just say the obvious: coffee mug faith isn't gonna cut it.

Faith that is really just a cheerful outlook sprinkled on top of an already good life, may have been of help in the past,

but now it's useless...

in order for it to be of any real help, faith can't be the decorations and furniture - it has to be the load bearing structure that can withstand flood and fire and global pandemics.

Because faith isn't the thing that goes first when a crisis happens, it's what is left after a crisis happens

When the power of positive thinking fails us -

When the empty promises of late-stage capitalism have failed us -

When our attempts to change ourselves and others have failed us -

When our vision for what our lives would look like have failed us -

When our bodies and dreams have failed us -

Simple faith remains.

Peter teaches us that.

Because Peter's faith is the kind that is honest about exhaustion and failure, honest about what life really feels like and then still says AND YET.

...Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. And yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets."

It's easy to confuse having faith with just ignoring reality in favor of some kind of delusional positivity, but toxic positivity never helps anything, and it is particularly unhelpful right now. I mean, the other day after another lousy news cycle I posted a tweet that said "I think we should all check on our optimist friends right now".

Because we are indeed in the space between exhaustion and the deep, and facing the deep can be terrifying and we may long to return to the shores of 2019, but I want you to know that as I studied the Greek word for the deep, BATHOS, I found that it shows up somewhere else. It shows up in Romans 8 (which says).

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor (bathos) the deep, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we can admit we are exhausted and do not wish to go to the deep, and yet we can know that even here, we will not be separated from the mothering, protective love of God. It doesn't fit on a coffee mug, but it doesn't need to.

In closing, there was a surprising depiction recently of faith being what's left when everything else has failed us in the Netflix movie Don't Look Up. In which a meteor is moments away from destroying the earth. The characters are in the deepest part of the deep. And when putting faith in political solutions and big tech has failed them, they face their last moments by gathering for a thanksgiving style meal, a net-straining feast of gladness and gratitude. But they know something else is needed. And that something is prayer. In the midst of the world quite literally ending, no one was practicing self-improvement, or attempting to "manifest" some kind of excellence, they were praying.

The Timothée Chalamet character, a skateboard punk, proceeds to pray a prayer – the words of which have not left me since the first day I saw the film.

The world was about to be destroyed AND YET he prayed.

"Dearest Father and Almighty Creator, we ask for your grace tonight, despite our pride, your forgiveness, despite our doubt. Most of all, Lord, we ask for your love to soothe us through these dark times. May we face whatever is to come in your divine will with courage and open hearts of acceptance."

We haven't been on the shore for quite a while. We are exhausted. AND YET despite our pride, there is grace in the deep. Despite our doubt, there is forgiveness in the deep (not to mention, yes, a whole lot of fish). The protective love of God is soothing us here in this dark time allowing us to face whatever is to come with courage and open hearts of acceptance.

So with the simple, AND YET faith of Peter we can say: AMEN.