

February 13, 2022  
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God is Calling, What Did the Disciples Do?  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 5:1-11

New Revised Standard Version

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He 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. When he had finished speaking, he 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. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and 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." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Have you ever stayed up all night long? On purpose? I always fall asleep! It is impossible for me to stay up all night long. This story about Simon hearing a call from Jesus seems impossible. In those days fishing was dangerous work. It was physically demanding and there was little financial reward. Simon had just docked his boat and was cleaning up. He was smelly, frustrated, and very tired when he saw Jesus walking towards him. I imagine Simon was ready to go home, clean up, and go to bed, but then Jesus gets on his boat and asks him to row him out a bit so he could teach.

After he finished teaching, Jesus told Simon to row out into the deep waters and let down his nets for a catch. It was in those deep waters where the fish were plentiful, but the further a fisherman went out in the boat, the more at risk they were. They knew when they left their homes for the day's work they might not return. In those deep waters there were no anchors and there was no compass. Storms could develop with little notice and the visibility in deep water was next to nothing. When a fisherman took their boat to the deep waters, they were risking it all. Have you ever risked it all?

Simon knew how to fish. He knew the waters and where and when he was most likely to catch fish. Often he was successful. But he had spent the entire previous night fishing with no catch. His nets had come up completely empty. So when Jesus told him to go out and start fishing again, Simon bit his tongue. I mean, had Jesus looked in the nets? Had he looked in the boats? Where had he been? There is a time to give up and go home and that time was now. Catching any fish now seemed impossible.

"Yet if you say so," Simon says. Simon had worked all night long and caught nothing. Yet if you say so. We can't tell Simon's tone, but we can hear the exhaustion in Simon's words. We also hear obedience. If you say so Jesus, then I will do this. It seems to me that we can respond to God in two ways. We can feel God tugging on our heart to do something and say something and we can ignore it. Or we can honor God by acknowledging that it is God calling us, God speaking to us, God urging us forward and we can tell God that we will do what God asks. Even though we may have our doubts that it will lead to anything. We will do what God says because it is God who is calling. It is God that will make this happen.

Simon's nets became so filled with fish that they began to break. He had to call to his friends for help, and then their boats began to sink with the weight of the catch. When Simon saw this surprising, grace-filled abundance, something clicked in his heart and changed within his soul. The writer of Luke's Gospel wants us to know about this change because now Simon

will be known as Simon Peter. Simon gets a new name. In the Bible when someone gets a new name, it means that they have had a change of heart, a change of vocation, of purpose. After this experience, Simon Peter can't look at Jesus, he averts his eyes. He doesn't call Jesus Master anymore, he calls him Lord. He falls to his knees and he sees all the ways that he has fallen short of who God created him to be. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

It's as if Simon Peter is telling Jesus, I don't know exactly who you are, and I don't know exactly what you want with me, but you need to find somebody else. I cannot be who you want me to be. Please, just go away. But Jesus stayed there with him and told him not to be afraid. Jesus told Simon Peter to trust and follow and he would find a grace-filled abundance of new life and new purpose.

Once they get to shore, Simon and two of his fishing partners leave everything and follow Jesus. They walk away from a boat full of fish. If we say yes, we may have to walk away from a full boat. What kind of sacrifices will we have to make? I learn so much from all of you. I remember once complaining to Judy Kline about our alternative Christmas market called the Global Village Market and trying to see if the church could keep some small part of the money that is raised from that amazing weekend. Judy looked at me and said, when you invite people to be generous, they are more generous in all aspects of their life.

To me following Jesus is a minute by minute decision to love God and to love my neighbor. That's why we come to worship, to hear the call and learn to follow Jesus, and teach each other to follow Jesus. If we can echo Simon's earlier words, "Yet if you say so," the fear may begin to creep in. We may become paralyzed by all of the possibilities of where we might go and what that means for our life. So, we get stuck. We don't follow the call and we don't echo Simon's words, "Yet if you say so."

The truth is we don't know how God works. God works in mysterious ways, ways we often don't see and certainly do not control. We don't know why some days our nets come up empty and other times they are so full they break under the weight of an abundant catch. We can't predict when or why or how a person we've been alienated from suddenly offers forgiveness or seeks reconciliation. We don't know when or how society wakes up to its own bigotry against people of color or LGBTQ people and starts to change oppressive policies. We are usually surprised when warring factions put down their weapons and seek peace. The fact is, God does work and God calls us to join in that work. If we don't let down our nets, we will never catch fish. Whether the call seems impossible or not, God invites us to go out into the deeper waters and let down our nets.

"Yet if you say so." God calls us to be instruments of transformation in our world working for justice, creative peace and compassion. To do this work, we have to rely on God's guidance, God's strength, and the movement of the Holy Spirit and remember that it is not *we* who are making something happen but *God*.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport. It demands that we unclench our fists and open our hearts to those who are different than us. The Christian life might even demand that we give and give until we reach a point where we have to rely on the generosity of others. The Christian life demands that we follow the call of God. It may be uncomfortable to use your voice, to work alongside the vulnerable, to read the Bible, to look for yourself, to teach Sunday School to children, or to bring dinner for the youth. *But, we don't do this work alone.*

Jesus tells the disciples and he tells *us* that we will become catchers of people. The people here at Greenland Hills in this community are the net. We catch each other, we depend on each other, and we hold each other through the deepest of waters. We have been formed in the

waters of baptism. Now, may we learn to swim in the deep water together. With the grace of God and the support of one another, let's say "Yet if you say so," and let's go fishing! Thanks be to God, Amen.