

## The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 6, 2022

Isaiah 6:1-8 [9-13]

Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

### Into the Deep

*A sermon preached by the Rev. Dianne Andrews  
At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Port Townsend, WA.*



Dawn has broken and the fishermen are bone weary and disheartened. Their night's work has left them with empty nets that needed to be picked clean of the tangled debris that had been dredged from the bottom of Lake Gennesaret. It was a fruitless night... and there is nothing to show for it... except the drudgery of scouring and mending empty nets.

In contrast to the other gospel stories about the calling of the first disciples, in Luke's gospel the fishermen know about Jesus. After Jesus had come on the scene from his time in the wilderness, he had taught in the local synagogue before being nearly run out of town. Jesus had even been to Simon's home to heal his mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. Simon knew that Jesus could teach and heal. The story of Jesus calling the first disciples is more ample in Luke than the simpler versions found in the other three gospels. In Matthew and Mark<sup>1</sup>, we hear... simply... that Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee when he saw Simon and Andrew casting nets. Jesus walks up them and says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ...and immediately... the two fishermen drop their nets, leave their families, and follow the charismatic Jesus into an unknown future. James and John, the sons of Zebedee drop their nets, too.

In the gospel according to John, the soon-to-be followers of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist. John had been enthusiastically telling his followers about the amazing experience of baptizing Jesus and how, when Jesus rose up out of the water, John saw the Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove.<sup>2</sup> The fourth gospel then tells us that the next day, as Jesus approaches, John points to him and says "Look, here is the Lamb of God." Soon after, Simon and Peter were on board as followers of Jesus. However the story is told, we know the names of the charter members of the Jesus Movement.

Jesus' skill as a carpenter seems quite insignificant as he engages with Simon that early morning by the lake. What did Jesus know about fishing? Or about nets? A carpenter, with relatively little fishing experience, borrows an empty boat so that he could speak to the crowd that had gathered along the shore of lake Gennesaret. A bone-weary Simon Peter was obliged... not only to interrupt his net cleaning and mending... but to help push the boat a little way out from the shore so that Jesus could speak to the gathered crowd. As he was sitting in the boat with Jesus, Simon listened to the teacher's words. When the talk was over, Jesus, the one who was not a fisherman, doesn't gently suggest that

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20

<sup>2</sup> John 1:29-42

Simon put his nets out into the deep water. He tells Simon to go deep. Simon let Jesus know how he was feeling... which was completely and utterly exhausted... before saying, "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." We know the story. By following Jesus' instructions to put the nets down in deep water, the nets were soon filled... so filled with shimmering fish that the nets nearly broke, the weight nearly sinking the boat. Simon's business enterprise nearly went, literally, under water. Simon Peter's response was not to flip out about the drama, but to fall on his knees and confess his unworthiness for the bountiful catch. Though Simon confesses his sinfulness, Jesus does not tell him to go and sin no more. All those who were watching the miraculous catch were amazed, including those who were helping with the haul. So, too, were Simon's business partners, James and John, sons of Zebedee. Jesus tells Simon not to be afraid, and then informs Simon Peter that his life would change. Jesus showed up right when he was needed. His simple instruction was to put out in deep water. Jesus taught.. using language that the fishermen understood. Of course, the disciples would not literally be fishing for people, but they already had the foundation for a new language of discipleship. Though they left a bountiful catch of fish behind... and abandoned their business... the men brought their true treasures with them. To the new enterprise, the fledgling disciples brought the whole themselves... and not just the boast-worthy. Their toolbox contained all that they had known and experienced... and a willingness to follow Jesus into an unknown future.

Jesus' statement, "I will make you fish for people"<sup>3</sup> or, in some other another translations, "...fish for men," can feel somewhat evangelistic in a negative sense, as if disciples are being called to save souls for the great heavenly ledger book. That is but one interpretation. It might be helpful to think about the kinds of nets that were used in the day. The word for net... in the Greek text... refers to a kind of dragnet. Such a net would be cast between two boats to skim through the water and along the bottom of the lake, and then dragged to shore with its haul. The net would capture not only fish, but wood and debris as well. Edible and inedible fish, alike, would be caught. I like to think that the nets in which God seeks to catch us... are not seeking just the top grade, the choice, the "kingdom quality" only... kind of catch. I like to think that the brimming nets of love... that Jesus is talking about... truly contain, as one author envisions such a catch:

*...everything: the weeds, the detritus of dysfunctional relationships and human brokenness, the debris of daily life lived in service to the masters of economies and political powermongers. The community of shalom, our dragnet, "touches everything in the world: not just souls, but bodies, and not just people, but all things, animal, vegetable, and mineral."*<sup>4</sup>

God wants us all to come within the life-giving, healing embrace of heaven on earth. In Christ we, and all creation, are drawn into these nets of love, called to be in beloved relationship with God, with one another, and with creation.

The disciples were not called because they were perfect. Their "yes" ... their willingness... was their passport into a new venture with Jesus, in a project of helping to build God's reign on earth. The work was... and is... to meet people where they are, and to bring them to the knowledge and depth of God's love through the building of respectful relationships of mutuality. Just as Jesus meddled in the lives of the fishermen, God seeks to meet us where we are, to interrupt our rote, ingrained patterns, and to show us a new and better way.

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<sup>3</sup> NRSV version

<sup>4</sup> Citation lost...

The first lesson in this new curriculum, is to approach a well-worn project... differently. To try a new approach. To cast...willingly... into deep waters... is to welcome life transforming abundance that is waiting to be harvested. What does it mean to go deeply in our lives of discipleship? How do we do this?

Spiritual teachers have much to say about this topic. They would ask that we begin by paying attention, of contemplating the present moment, the only place where we can truly encounter God. There is much to explore at the sacred intersection... of what has been... and the pregnant moment of new possibilities... The invitation is to listen deeply In order to identify things that need to be released.... In order to welcome new ways of seeing and knowing... to notice the places where we hurt and are in need of healing... to open the door to an uncertain, yet promising path forward... to say “yes” to following Jesus through that door on the path of deepened life in him. Spiritual teachers would also recommend recommitting to a regular practice of paying attention... of weaving or reweaving into a routine of prayer... silence, devotion, and worship... in order to better meet... and grow in... the depths of Gods abundant love.

Jesus used fish and nets as an object lesson, in a language that would be readily understood. What is the language that speaks to our lives, in this moment? Here are some questions to consider:

- How, at this moment in our lives, is God seeking to grab our attention?
- What arises when we sit in stillness to ponder the deep waters of God’s love?
- What... in our lives... needs to be set down and left behind?
- Are our hands and hearts open to receive?

....so that we are ready to receive gifts of new life

... gifts that we, in our discipleship, can pass on to others

...that the abundance may be multiplied...

- What is God saying to us today? Right now? In this moment?

As Jesus meddled in the lives of the fishermen, God seeks to meet us where we are... to interrupt us... out of our stuporous routines... and to show us a deeper way. Encounters with God promise to broaden our perspectives, exceed our expectations, and transform our lives.

The invitation is to explore the depths...

....that we may encounter the living God

Here... now... and always...

*Amen...*