

Knowing Jesus in Epiphany - Trusting Jesus

Luke 5:1-11

5th Sunday After the Epiphany

February 10, 2019

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Luke 5:1-11 (NRSV) Jesus Calls the First Disciples

5 Once while Jesus^[a] was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ 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. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ 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. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

In the early 2000's there as television show called *Joan of Arcadia*.

The show was a twist on Joan of Arc in that the 21st century Joan met God.

Not **GOD**.

Rather, God in the form of the garbage man, a pierced, tattooed punk rocker, the girl who walked the dog; unexpected forms of **GOD**.

I didn't watch the show very often, but once, **GOD** came as a cute teenage boy who told Joan she should do something that scared her...and then he walked away.

Well, wouldn't **you** have a couple questions?

We all would!

There are a lot of things that we're afraid of; how would we pick just one?

In our Bible study, Becoming a Romans 12 Christian, we've been talking about *surrendering all*. And I think the whole group would agree that *surrendering* everything would rank right up there with a scary thing to do.

'Cause God asks us, often (and *if we're open to hearing* God's invitations.)

We fear change...

...of our wills and attitudes...

...of how we knock down our barriers that keep us from relationships with

"outsiders" (meaning "not us")...AND from knowing ourselves better so that we experience personal growth.

ALL SCARY!

We mutter something like: "I'd rather fall out of a plane with a parachute than..."

You can fill in your own blanks. "Anything than change."

What's interesting, though, (and we probably don't "get it" until later) is that *what God is asking us to do is the RIGHT thing to do.*

It might not feel like it at the time, but we GROW as a person and in relationships with others, and MOST importantly, WITH GOD, when we step out and do things that scare us a bit.

Now, scared is one thing.

Having fear is another.

FEAR is paralyzing and can keep us in our current state of being rather than growing into who God is calling us to be.

Fear is probably what kept Saul (before he became the apostle Paul) in *his* status quo of persecuting the people who DID follow Jesus.

Fear is what twists us up into thinking we're not worthy of anything, especially of being loved.

Fear takes away our reasoning 'cause we talk ourselves into thinking that there will be consequences (negative rather than positive.)

Fear, Dear Ones, doesn't have God's imagination of wonder about our futures.

Bottom line: FEAR DOESN'T ALLOW US TO SEE the WHOLE STORY and keeps us in a place where we're not going to experience all that comes in living a life in Christ.

Yet, that's right where God finds us.

Just like Jesus found Simon Peter in today's Scripture reading.

This is Luke's version of the calling of Jesus' first disciples.

After the harrowing time at the synagogue (that we touched on for the last two Sundays,) Jesus begins to step outside the comfort zone of "home" and starts doing just what he said he would, "to bring good news to the poor and oppressed."

The crowds are ALREADY pressing in on him so when he sees Simon Peter and *his* boat, he puts a tuckered out from an all-nighter of UNSUCCESSFUL fishing, Peter back to work.

Oh, did he ever!

Jesus came to Peter and the other fishermen and asked them to do something that seems unthinkable AND scary.

John Wesley once used his father's tombstone to stand on to be able to preach to a large crowd.

And Jesus used the "platform" of Peter's boat to preach to the crowds on the shore.

I don't know how Wesley OR Jesus were heard without the PA systems we use these days.

Divine speaking AND hearing, I think!

In his book, Just Like Jesus, Max Lucado wrote, "God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way."

And poor Peter.

He is exhausted.

But he complied.

Not just having his boat commandeered, but when Jesus is done preaching he tells Peter to go out to *even deeper* water and put his nets down again.

Exhaustion or fear, Peter is reluctant.

He might have even been a little *prejudiced*, “What’s this preacher guy know about fishing!?”

But Peter surrendered his prejudice and threw the nets again.

He did what Jesus told him to do.

Sometimes, we experience God’s miracles when **we** surrender, let down whatever “net” is blocking us, and let God work IN us.

He loves us with our “empty nets” – but refuses to leave the nets AND US empty.

See, we **could** stay the same, but it would go against the covenant made at our baptisms that we will have transforming power when we follow Jesus.

Jesus meets us right where we are and gives us an opportunity to experience God’s grace.

But, what did Peter do after his nets were filled to the point of breaking?

What would YOU say to that kind of miracle?

We’d say “thank you, very much,” right?

But Peter is different.

He, the Bible says, “fell down at Jesus’ knees” and **asked Jesus to leave!**

Now, remember, Peter is the only one who was in that boat when Jesus was sharing the Good News.

He’s had an up-close hearing...and I’d say, had a definite nudge that it wasn’t just about fish.

He was convicted of both his own sinfulness, he says so, and of Jesus’ holiness.

God loved Peter enough to come to him in his imperfection, but God WASN’T going to leave him there.

Peter didn’t have to have everything right.

God has always used the imperfect of us, “outsiders” if you will, for God’s plan!

Who’s perfect, besides Jesus, in the Bible?

Not Moses or David or Mary Magdalene; and not Peter.

All they *had to do* was be willing to drop their prejudice and lifestyle and their own “whatever” and trust Jesus.

We aren’t perfect either.

But, can’t **we** be willing to drop our own baggage and fears and follow?

It’s a simple sounding question, isn’t it?

Simple to hear.

For Peter and his friends they had heard enough.

They’d listened from the shore (and Peter IN his boat) and then were witnesses to a miracle that showed God’s net-breaking abundance.

They were so drawn to Jesus, that EVEN WITH ALL THOSE FISH, that surely would have been more than enough to keep them in business a long time, they WALKED AWAY fish!

It’s not about the fish, Silly!

It should be like that for us, too!

We read or hear about Jesus’ miracles in the Bible.

And **if we’ve been REALLY LISTENING**, we can be witnesses to God’s goodness and grace in our own lives...and then BE compelled to **want** leave everything and follow Jesus, too.

Jesus told Peter and the boys, “Don’t be afraid...dot.dot.dot...”

And he REFUSED to leave them there.

“Don’t be afraid; from now on you’ll be catching people!”

Just like Jesus caught them, “netted” them in the abundance of God, now they were going to get back to shore and would leave all that behind to follow him.

EVERYTHING was going to be different because they were making Jesus...making God, the very center of their lives.

What would that be like for us?

I didn't take very many business classes after high school.

But as business owners, Gene taught me about having goals that focused on how to make our tire store successful. Gene was (is) better at the business. But our list (for me unwritten once Gene got the budget prepared) kept us on track.

It's really the same for running our households with our families, or our church with the Council, or our personal walks of faith with Jesus!

All of those work more effectively if we keep focused on the values that are important.

Our decisions about what direction we should take are ALREADY formulated because not only are we informed through God's Word, about God's plan for us, but we're following God's plan for our lives.

What if we REALLY applied this principle to our Christian life?

What if, like for those first disciples, Jesus was at the center of every decision we made?

It is not just asking "what would **Jesus** do," but more personal: "what would Jesus have *me* do?"

Our principle values can come from using our spiritual gifts or recalling the baptismal covenant that we reaffirmed just a few weeks ago saying "With God's help, I will."

It could be being resolved to serve Christ by proclaiming release to the captives and finding freedoms for the oppressed of *every* description.

We'd be different, wouldn't we!?

So would the WORLD!

IT IS up to us whether the encounter we each have with Jesus is a one-time thing or an eternal one.

Remember, Peter fell to his knees and pretty much said he wasn't worthy to be in the same boat. So we have to **hear that the abundance came first....**and then Peter reacted.

But also remember that Jesus' response was THE invitation, "Don't be afraid; from now on you'll be catching people." It wasn't even in the form of a question, "Would you like to follow me?"

Nope, as witnesses to God's abundance, WE aren't going to be left where God found us. God refuses to leave us there and God's grace is ALWAYS there. The abundance is always available. We just have to receive it.

When we're called by God, to follow Jesus, it DOES take more than just willingness or setting our goals for success.

It takes us being humble, giving to surrender, and responding, *"Thank You, God, very much AND I WILL, WITH YOUR HELP!"*

We have the will.

And God IS the way.

God sees us as we are but refuses to leave us that way.

This isn't a dumb challenge to do something scary or be paralyzed with fear.

Leave behind the fish, Silly. We have an invitation to accept.

Amen? Amen!