February 10, 2019   
Luke 5:1-11   
Follow Jesus

Rev. Kerry Smith   
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 5:1-11 Common English Bible

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God’s word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, “Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch.” Simon replied, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.” So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee’s sons, were Simon’s partners and they were amazed too. Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people.” As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Church has always been a safe place for me. It has always been a place where I felt welcomed and loved. I wanted to go to church. In fact, I got my first speeding ticket on my way to church and was in my first car accident on the way to church. I still remember the fear of telling my mom what had happened! When I went to college I signed up for Biblical studies because I thought I would make an A. I had grown up in the church after all, but I made a B! I decided that there might be more to this Bible stuff than I thought!

I kept taking religion classes. I remember one called Religion in America. We visited different places of worship and I remember going to a small Presbyterian church where there were lots of people with white hair. Out bounced this young blond female pastor and I turned to my then boyfriend, who is now my husband, and said, “I could do that,” and I remember him telling me, “You could.” I had gone to a United Methodist Church my entire life but we were at a large church in Houston and there weren’t any women up front. I had never seen a woman pastor lead worship before and I didn’t know it was an option. After college I still didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life so I spent a year teaching English in Japan and had to travel an hour and a half to go to a Christian church where I tuned the Walkman that they gave me so I could hear the worship translated into English.

I had majored in Religion in college so I thought I would continue my studies at graduate school. Maybe I would be a youth pastor. That sounded like fun. I applied to Perkins School of Theology at SMU and they have an internship as part of the degree program. I remember I was about to stand up and lead the Call to Worship on my first Sunday and I was terrified. My knees were shaking, my voice was shaking, and I didn’t know how I was going to do it. I just had to read what was printed in the bulletin! So, I breathed, and I prayed, and I asked God to be with me. I stood up and my knees and my voice stopped shaking. I love being a pastor. For me it was a gradual calling. Sometimes I wish that I had a story like Paul when a light from God struck him blind on the road to Damascus.

For Simon Peter, James, and John, the day Jesus shows up and gets into their fishing boat is the beginning of a life-changing journey. It had already been a long day for Simon Peter, James, and John. They had worked hard and Jesus tells them to keep working. The call of Jesus came in the midst of their ordinary routines. That is important. They didn’t have this holy moment in church or in prayer, but instead it came during the busyness of life. It happened while they were exhausted and grumpy. They had been fishing all night and were cleaning the nets, and I bet they wanted to finish the job and get to bed. But, for some reason they were willing to go out with Jesus and drop the freshly cleaned nets one more time.

I find it interesting that Jesus didn’t ask for permission to get involved in their lives. Jesus doesn’t ask for our permission either. God simply encounters us with grace. I remember visiting with someone a few years ago who had made a New Year’s Resolution to say yes. Whenever anyone asked him anything, he was going to say yes. Yes to helping set-up the neighborhood picnic, yes to being on the PTA, yes to mowing the lawn, yes to serving on a non-profit board. All year he said yes. That’s what Simon Peter, James, and John do. Even though they had fished all night and caught nothing, even though they didn’t expect anything to be different this time, they said yes. In a situation with no promise, they were willing to try again. They were willing to hope. They leave behind their carefully arranged security, their sure routines, and they rely on hope.

The catch is so large, the nets were beginning to break and the boat is in danger of sinking. I can imagine their faces filled with wonder and delight. They expected nothing when they let down their nets and they get this huge catch. This miraculous catch of fish. As the reader we are supposed to be reminded of all the other times in the Bible that there was a miracle with food. With Moses and the Israelites wandering and the manna and quail in the wilderness. With Elijah and the flour and the oil (1 Kings 17:8-16). With Elisha who received enough oil, grain, and bread to feed a hundred people (2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44). Jesus provided an abundance of fish.

We get stuck in these cycles of scarcity and fear where we think that we don’t have enough. This story is a reminder for us about the abundance that is all around us. God brings us abundance. It might not be an abundance of fish, but it is an abundance of love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I have been wondering if maybe we need to invest ourselves in the exact place where we are most afraid or intimated. If we are afraid of homeless people, maybe we need to volunteer at Oak Lawn UMC with their homeless shelter. Maybe we need to take bigger risks and step beyond our comfort zones. Maybe we need to ask for help more often or ask for forgiveness.

There is a similar story to this one in John 21 after Jesus’ resurrection. The disciples cast their nets on the right side of the boat and there were so many fish. The Bible tells us that there were 153 fish. I love that the fishermen counted how many fish there were. Fishermen count when they catch fish. Counting blessings is what we do when we are blessed. We are encouraged to keep gratitude journals after all, not everything is horrible journals. Everyone in this story in Luke would have counted the number of fish and been amazed. Then, they would have said thank you, but Simon Peter doesn’t do that. Instead, Simon Peter falls at Jesus’ knees and says, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” Simon Peter experiences this moment of sheer grace and he is filled with joy and maybe even a little fear. I remember holding my babies in my arms filled with such happiness and also worried about everything – their health, their happiness, would they have friends, would they do well in school, would they find love? In moments of grace we realize that we have received more than we deserve or even imagine. We wonder how such blessings have come our way and we realize that God’s grace is so much bigger than ourselves.

In this miracle Simon Peter has an awareness about who he is and who Jesus is. Simon Peter believes in Jesus and he knows that Jesus is where he belongs. I believe in Jesus and Jesus is where I belong. The fishermen had done nothing to deserve Jesus’ call to them. Jesus didn’t call the most capable or the most qualified. The fishermen were not called because of their qualifications, character or potential. Jesus called them not because of who they were, but because of who they could be. God’s call to us is rooted in everyday life, and the promptings from God to serve happen during our regular routines. In the midst of the ordinary, our calling emerges and no person is good enough, or strong enough, or pure enough. But we are called anyway. I think of one of our youth, seventh grader Emma Qualia, making sandwiches for the homeless and raising money to buy comforters to help keep people warm. God draws us in and then calls us and pulls us and then pushes us out. James and Simon Peter and John left their filled boats and nets. They left safety and everything that they knew and everything that they had and they followed Jesus. They don’t leave everything and follow Jesus because they are confident in their own abilities. They leave everything and follow Jesus because they are confident in Jesus’ command, “because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.” What do we need to leave behind so that we can answer Jesus’ call? Are we willing to leave it?

A faith journey starts with a confession, proclaiming who Jesus is and knowing who we are. I am a pastor who loves Jesus and messes up every single day. Jesus tells Simon Peter not to be afraid, he is going to be fishing for people from now on. Jesus sees something that Simon Peter can’t see. Through the doubt and the fear, God is with Simon Peter and from now on the world will be changed. Jesus doesn’t tell Simon Peter that his sins are forgiven, he says, “Do not be afraid.” Yes, we know that Jesus forgives our sin, but Jesus does so much more. Jesus offers us comfort and encouragement.[[1]](#footnote-1) We hear the words, “Do not be afraid” a lot in Luke’s Gospel. God becomes one of us in Jesus to remind us that we don’t have to be afraid.

In Luke’s Gospel, the disciples don’t hear those familiar words, “Follow Me.” They hear instead that they will fish for people. They will catch people up in the unimaginable and life-changing grace of God.[[2]](#footnote-2) They will live by Jesus’ teachings and call others to Jesus just as they have been called. I love how God always chooses the unlikeliest characters through whom to work. God puts aside all their doubt and fear and excuses and professed shortcomings to do marvelous things through them.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Then, the fishermen give everything up, their professions, their livelihood, their family, their friends, everything, and they follow Jesus. And that is terrifying because Jesus is talking to me too. Jesus calls me to put aside all my doubt and fear and excuses and professed shortcomings so that God can do amazing things through me. Jesus is talking to all of us. Jesus wants us to put aside our doubt and fear and excuses and professed shortcomings so that God can do amazing things through us. Would we give up everything to follow Jesus? Jesus is still coming to us saying, “Do not be afraid,” Jesus is still coming to us to call us to things that we cannot imagine. Jesus knows our sins and our doubts and our fears and our inadequacies, but Jesus is still coming and speaking and calling us.

Being faithful means that in our lives, in our ordinary, crazy, chaotic days, we stop to listen to Jesus’ voice. And with every breath, may we hear the voice of God telling us to not be afraid. Following Jesus means leaving everything that we have and everything that we know and being open to the next right thing that God wants us to do. May we open our eyes and open our hearts to be curious so that we may see Jesus’ real presence in the life of this world. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2019/02/epiphany-5-c-lots-to-love/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2019/02/epiphany-5-c-lots-to-love/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2019/02/epiphany-5-c-lots-to-love/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)