

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1-11

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.

Beloved, the grass withers, and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever.
Amen.

So, this is a call story for Simon, for James, and for John, but they don't know it's a call story. Not when it begins. They have been fishing all night as the story begins. They have come up to shore. They are cleaning their net that has been empty all night long, and the story says that Jesus comes and there's a great crowd that is pressing in on him. So many people have been attracted to this message of the good news of the gospel that they are pressing in because they are hungry to hear a word of God. This crowd pressing in so much makes Jesus need to find an alternative pulpit. So, he commandeers a boat and asks Simon as they get in the boat to go out a little way from shore. He uses that boat as a pulpit, and he preaches there. We don't get anything about what he preaches and teaches, but, obviously, he goes on for some time. Then he says to Simon, "Simon, let out into the deep water. Put down your nets for a catch."

Now it seems to me that all of us in one way or another have felt the way that Simon feels on that shore that morning. All of us, like Simon, have fished all night and come up empty. All of us have been frustrated, confused, maybe a little angry, after putting in a whole bunch of work just to have it bear no fruit or seemingly. We can see ourselves mending our nets, cleaning them up, putting them away so that they can be used some other time. We could see ourselves in Simon that morning, and for that matter, James, and John. This whole crew that's waded together through a dark night and ended up with empty nets. One of my favorite preachers and mentors loves that turn of phrase, that we can fish all night and come up empty. It's true, not just in the life of these fishermen, but in our lives too. We can fish in relationships, we can fish in friendships, parenting, and work, even communally in advocacy. We can fish all night and come up with nothing. We can fish all night in the waters of addiction or in trauma. We could fish all

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night trying to figure out what it is that might be produced from this long night and come up empty. That's what Simon and the rest of his crew were feeling that morning, and then Jesus happens upon them. Not just Jesus, but a big old crowd that gets to actually stand and see the fruit, or lack thereof, of Simon and his friend's hard work. I was thinking about this week sometimes when we have disappointments. They happen privately sometimes, and they happen more publicly. These fishermen are supposed to have full nets when they come ashore. They're supposed to be preparing to go to the market to sell them. This big crowd, though, shows up and sees not just Jesus, but some fishermen who aren't very good at fishing. At least that's what they might think. Jesus commandeers the boat, and they go out into the water where he preaches for a while. I wonder how much he thought about that move of asking Simon to borrow his boat and make it a pulpit for a while.

My imagination tells me he knew what he was doing. When he gets done, Jesus says to Simon, "Let out to the deep water." This is the first clue that we need to start paying attention to. The sermon is done. Whatever was spoken or preached is over, but now this is an interaction between Jesus and a friend. Some people think this is Simon's first interaction with Jesus, It's not. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus has come into Simon's house where Simon's mother was very sick. Jesus has helped to heal her by his power. So, Simon knows who this Jesus is. So, when he instructs him to let out to the deep water, Simon knows that something is happening. Through his exhaustion, perhaps even his frustration, he lets Jesus know that we've been fishing all night, Jesus, and we've caught nothing. We've been out here. This is what we do for a living. We navigate these waters all the time. If there was something under that water, we would know it because we've been throwing out our nets over and over and over again. If there was something we could do to will this vision to happen, to will a result, it would have already happened. There's nothing we can do. Then we hear from Simon this incredible turn of faith. He says But if you say so. We've been fishing out here all night and our nets are empty. There's nothing out there to find, but if you say so. If you say so, we'll go out a little bit farther to a little deeper water. If you say so, we'll take these nets that we just cleaned out and we've got perfect for tomorrow, unwrap them again and let them down. If you say so, we'll spend a little more time out here. We'll respond to your call, and we'll do the thing that you're asking of us. If you say so.

I mean, how many of us, right, have fished all night tired, frustrated, and yet we hear these words 'let out to the deeper water and let down your nets for a catch.' What happens, of course, is the nets are filled with so many fish scripture tells us that as Simon is trying to pull those nets back into his boat it is overwhelmed. I love this. Simon is overwhelmed by this thing that has been drawn up from the deep water, but he doesn't think that he's supposed to handle every bit of this load this catch by himself. His default, in a moment like this, is to call upon neighbors and friends to come and to aid him and to walk with him. So, he signals to the other boat. Y'all come over here. I can't handle all this myself. The other boat comes over as well and so many fish are brought in by those nets and so much is produced by this last cast of the net that both boats begin to be overwhelmed. You can just imagine them struggling out there in the deeper water farther from shore with this beautiful provision that is now threatening them as well.

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In that moment, Simon falls to his knees and says, “Go away from me.” He knows what's happened and what Jesus has done.

His first response is to invite others to participate, and his second response is to humbly confess that he had no idea what was about to happen.

It's an interesting lesson. As those boats weighed down by fish make their way back to the shore, you can see them being pulled back up onto that sandy coast of the lake with more fish than they could have ever imagined, especially after a long dark night of casting and pulling back in and casting and pulling back in and casting and pulling back in and there being nothing in those nets.

They have fished all night and come up empty until now. They get to shore, and scripture says “that they were amazed by what they saw.” Not just Simon, but James and John as well. They were so amazed that they left everything and followed Jesus, but they weren't just amazed by this. Remember that they've met Jesus before, and they've seen him just a couple of scenes earlier be about the work of healing too. But this morning on the seashore they leave the fish and the nets, and they follow Jesus. Most of us can be okay with almost all the story. We can be okay with some tired fishermen acting as guides, or providing a space for Jesus to preach, going out just a little way offshore. We can be okay, even, with them digging deep throwing out the nets one more time. We can be okay with them pulling in a huge lot of fish and then having to tag-team it to get it back to shore, but we can't be okay with them leaving everything. Can you imagine how much they left there on the shore?

Can you imagine the provision?

The wealth?

Even the acclaim?

The best fishermen on the lake. Did you see that haul they brought in?

Can you imagine what they left there?

I mean, it doesn't get into details, but, when they leave their boats and their fish in their nets, that's not all they're leaving. They're leaving relationships, family even. We don't know that for sure, but that's what we might insinuate.

They're leaving because something has happened on this lake that's changed them forever.

They're leaving because when they were asked to go to deep water they were willing, not because they knew what was under the water not or they knew that there would be a big old haul of fish.

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They were willing because this man, this Jesus, whatever it was that he taught and preached, was compelling enough that they were willing, through their weariness and frustration, maybe even through their anger, to cast the nets one more time and to say we trust that there might be something here that you might provide.

A few weeks ago, we were talking about wine in the gospel of John, and how Jesus showed up to this wedding where they ran out. Jesus invites folks to fill these big old jars of water and incredibly they become wine. I told you from the pulpit at Idlewild that that story was not really about wine, and neither is this story about fish.

This story is about the good news of a savior who knows what is going on below the surface of our relationships, of our work lives, even of our advocacy here in the city. This savior knows what's going on as we navigate addiction and trauma.

This savior knows that in deep water beautiful and good things can come forth. The savior knows what it looks like to be disappointed, to be packing it in after a long dark night when you've come up empty.

This is a savior who encourages us to not just go it alone but to invite others along with us. This savior isn't content to stay where they are but to move from the places of comfort into places of challenge, to move by faith into those places.

I love this story. I love this story because of what it reminds me as a human being about my life.

It reminds me that no matter what frustration, no matter what anger, no matter what long night I've been fishing and come up empty, the God of all the universe cares and is present with me in the midst of that now. No matter what I'm navigating, God is there on that boat in that water.

More than that it reminds me and encourages me and inspires me for the body of Christ that is the Church.

Not only do we feel and hear this calling individually, but corporately together as a church. We are being called to deeper water. It has been a long pandemic and now an ice storm and a thousand things in between that might lead to some weariness and frustration, maybe even some anger.

The story reminds us that all God asks of us is to provide a space, maybe a boat.

It reminds us to provide a space, that God might be present, and then to listen when the voice of God speaks, calling us to go a little deeper and, even though our weariness, to cast the nets one more time.

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The God of all creation is there on the waters, and that's good news. It was good news for James and John and Simon. It was good news for Mary and for Martha. It was good news for all of those who pressed in on Jesus that morning and it's good news for you and us this day.

May we, no matter where we find ourselves today, maybe huddled around a fireplace, maybe having traveled away to some distant land, maybe just having joy that the power has been restored for us, know and trust that the same savior who was at work on that water, and on that shore a couple of thousand years ago, is at work within each of us this day and within the Church.

May we respond to the call to move into the deep water, and may we have the faith to let down our nets just one more time.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God. Mother of us all. Amen.