

You are Calling Me? Lord, Have Mercy!

Epiphany 5

February 6, 2022

Luke 5: 1-11

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.

⁴When 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.

Its morning, Jesus has just he healed a man in Capernaum
and he has spoken with such authority that

Luke says the people are amazed,
And they’ve followed him down to the sea of Galilee.

And as the fisherman are standing on the shore,
cleaning their nets

After a long, discouraging night,
And Jesus steps into one of their boats

And asks to be taken out a short ways
So to teach all those along along the beach.
The boat is Simon's
Who will be renamed Cephas, Peter, the Rock.

We do not hear Jesus teaching to the crowd,
That's not the focus of this story,
Its this, that once done he says to Simon and the others,

Take the boat out farther to fish
And they say, "Nope, we already tried, "
Try again, he says, but cast your nets on the other side.

And once they haul up all those fish, so that they begin to sink,
Simon is the one who is immediately aware
that he is in the presence of the divine
and just as aware of how unworthy he is.

And I don't think his life is any less worthy than mine or yours
Nor social ranking, we know that means nothing to God.
Imagine

Jesus climbs into
In the boat of my life
And says, I need you to help people hear me,
And then says,
Lets go out deeper.

How unworthy I would feel to be
in the presence of such holiness.

But, and here is the revelation, perhaps the real miracle.

The Lord needs Simon.

He needs those who are lowly, and those who are highborn

He invites all of them , all of us

To lend him our boats, these vessels, our lives,

For there is work to do

There are people to fish for.

That's a metaphor exactly right for fishermen,
But it rings of entrapment.
And don't fish die once you catch them?

But the direct translation in Greek is
ese zogron:
You will take men/humans alive.
You will save them.

When I was in Vietnam with my daughter
to explore her heritage, meet her birth family
We spent time with church folk there,
Including a young woman, who among English speakers
called herself Beth,
the first and only Christian in her family
Beth was teaching bible school for children
As she prepared for seminary .

At a restaurant in Saigon, Beth shared about her family
Her brother and father's estrangement
Her brothers suicide
And her struggle to forgive her father
And to help him see how he needed to change

She looked at the tables around us
Filled with young people, young families
And her eyes filled with tears.
These people
They don't realize
that there is more to life than money
They are so thirsty for it,
but they don't even know it.

She was a fisherwoman
She wanted to bring people out alive.

It is hard work, and she found the place to begin

Now its not been an easy time for the mainline churches,
Not in Vietnam, nor in the U.S. for awhile,

David Brooks, the centrist columnist for the New York Times
wrote an extraordinary article about
the evangelical churches and how
young people, including those in seminary
are leaving in numbers.

*Even those in seminary
are moving away from church as we normally conceive it.
They want to get away from all the bitterness of their elders*

“Modernity has peaked.” Said one leader

And Brooks agrees:

*The age of the autonomous individual,
the age of the narcissistic self,
the age of consumerism and moral drift
has left us with bitterness and division,
a surging mental health crisis
and people just being nasty to one another.*

What are churches offering?

12 Historic Black Colleges were attacked on February 1
As a warning at the beginning of
African American History Month
And what do we hear from churches
900,000 persons have died in this country from COVID, and
churches, from Evangelical to mainline
have split over masks!

*Millions are looking for something else, says Brooks,
They want to build communities that are
smaller, intimate, authentic,*

which can often fit in a living room.
They see faith as inseparably linked to
community service with the poor and marginalized some

They want system of belief that is communal,
that gives life transcendent meaning.

Go out into the deep and try another side, says Jesus
and bring the people out alive.

But we protest, we are inadequate, we say.

Lend me your boat, lend me your life, Jesus says
And I will lend you my authority,

Lend me your life, Jesus says
And I will give you a life one that fills your nets.

And we realize that somehow this life, this vessel
was already his.
That it was God's to begin with.

But what have we but the grace that calls us to Christ's service
The grace that allowed Simon
And all the rest, to set down their nets, and follow.

let the grace that moves us be the authority
May the Christ

You feel inadequate,
Good, so do I,
But Jesus, who walked the lakeshore
who healed the sick
Who forgave those who hurt him
Who loved his enemies
Who died at human hands and
Was raised by God's power and love,

calls us anyway,
Says that we are good enough to be vessels
To be couriers
To be fishers of people

Who says, *lend me your life, follow me.*

I will close with these words of Albert Schweitzer
A physician and theologian and musician:

*He comes to us as One unknown, without a name,
as of old, by the lakeside.*

He came to those men who knew him not.

*He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!"
and sets us to the tasks
which he has to fulfill for our time.*

He commands.

*And to those who obey Him,
whether they be wise or simple,
He will reveal Himself in the toils,
the conflicts, the sufferings
which they shall pass through in his fellowship,
and as an ineffable mystery,
they shall learn in their own experience
who He is.*

Patricia Wagner, Maple Grove UMC

