

LUKE 5:1-11

Epiphany, Fifth Sunday (Year C)

Text: Luke 5:1-11

A Sermon on Luke 5:1-11.

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When I read the gospel passage for this week, I simply could not, and cannot, get away from this gripping scene.

Here we have Jesus, whose fame has been spreading throughout Galilee and Judea, for a wondrous miracles he is working, healing, performing exorcisms, preaching good news.

Up to this point, his ministry has been alone, and Luke tells us his account of the change.

On one occasion, he says, the crowds were pressing in so greatly that Jesus stepped into a boat to teach a bit off-shore. The boat was Simon's. Simon Peter, the one we all know as the flawed and deeply human disciple. After teaching, Jesus tells Simon to put his nets in the deep water.

This is preposterous! They have been fishing all night! I know Jesus was a carpenter, moonlighting as a preacher/miracle worker, but now a fisherman? After getting his sensical word out that they had already fished all night and still caught nothing, Simon hesitantly puts the nets into the water.

And behold - hundreds of fish! It was a catch so great - as great as the wine in Cana. Fish teeming and bulging from the nets, breaking its straps and sinking their boat and their neighboring boats trying to haul in the massive load.

And then there is this scene. Simon Peter is beside himself. You can just picture him - looking at all this fish and thinking - not about the FISH per se - but about how terrifying and inexplicable and beyond any faculty of thinking is this man Jesus to him. He did not even have the categories to

understand how this could happen, who he was, why he was on his boat.

In this beautifully gripping scene He falls down onto the rusty fish-filled planks of his small fishing boat, he cannot even stand in Christ's presence, and cries "Go AWAY from the Lord, for I am a SINFUL man!"

As I sat with this image this week, it made me weep, as I thought about how often we are confronted with largeness, the terrifying, the complex and mysterious divinity, and are scared?

But this is often what calling looks like. This image, this story is compelling because we are able to see the rash and unmistakable humanity of Simon Peter, his insistence on reacting to the world with the full weight of his emotions - isn't this why we love him? Every once in a while the gospels are peppered with his impatience, his gut reactions, his passion, his shame ... so much like our own.

If only we could be like Paul, we think. Paul who was called by being knocked off a horse and blinded...another miracle had to happen for him to even be able to see again. This was an unmistakable calling, and unmistakable revelation of God from God. Paul knew he was called, and he was unmistakably led into new life.

But it is often different for us.

Like Simon, we get overwhelmed that God is God, and we are not. We feel too inadequate, too estranged. We estrange ourselves, because we cannot understand God and how God moves. What is calling anyway? We ask.

But that - that response, I would argue - is exactly the point. We ask. We question. We seek answers.

Even when we do not understand, our minds feel too small, our existence is too insignificant... we cannot even understand who God is, or how God works and we feel like such sinners and want cry out with Peter "go away from

me for I am sinful" ... let us continue to ask and wonder about God, for this asking is faith.

Faith isn't always about receiving answers to hard questions. I'm sure Peter didn't know what he was getting into when he decided to follow Christ. He didn't understand him at all! (and how could he!)

But eventually he was able to move past his fears of his own inadequacy, into a new life. He was able and open to being moved by God. And oh, did he follow.... All the way to the garden, and to the cross.

Faith is an openness to wonder, to question, to move where we feel God is leading.

Faith is an an openness to allowing God's invitation to be what it is - grace, gift, enough for us to receive it.

It is my hope this morning that we would be encouraged by this scene. That we would be able to move past our fears and inhabit a sense of wonder and openness essential to faith.

Let us ask where we feel the Lord is working and moving. Is God in the phone call from a dear friend? Where do we sense God's movement in the nursing home, or in a hospital, in the one who comes to pay us a visit? Is God's grace and mercy the gift of a good night's sleep, or the gift of daffodils in the spring - even though we don't see them now we KNOW they are down there underneath the snow, waiting to come up when the timing is right. Are we open to being moved by a song, a poem, a prayer, the occasional warm words from our children. Or in receiving the loving service of another. Is this a kind of calling? When we wonder and relish in these everyday gifts of God as blessings, as a sharing in God's own life and will? I believe it is, in a way.

Sometimes the questions don't necessarily lead to answers, but to more

and different kind of questions. This is okay.

In our disposition of eager questioning and wonderment, let us remember that Easter always comes. In our darkness or confusion, or amongst our fears, the Lord has and will speak to us, as to Peter, "Do not be afraid" as to Isaiah in our passage "Your guilt is taken away, your sin atoned for". The psalmist can say, "On the day I called, you answered me."

God accepts us and responds even when we fear, doubt, or even deny him as Peter did...

The claim of faith is that our vexed life has been answered and resolved by the attentive mercy of God.

So here we are, about to enter the season of Lent. Let us go into lent together, into a time of self-examination. But let us, with Peter, move beyond our fears, and together have faith that Easter is on the horizon, and our Lord HAS and WILL come and speak the final word into our darkness and our questioning hearts to say, "Do not be afraid, come and follow."

Emmanuel, God-with-us, has come to dwell among us.

So let us respond in respond in faith.

Amen.