

SERMON, AUGUST 11, 2024. Called to Go Deeper, Luke 5. 1-11

When I began reading Luke 5. 1-11 in preparation for today, the song, “Peter, James & John in a Sailboat”, came to mind. The second verse “Fished all night and caught no fish”, made sense, but the rest of the verses didn’t fit today’s story. I stopped to think about other stories in scripture in which water plays an important part and noticed that a lot of these “water” stories show God’s presence in water, on water and around water. I decided to rewrite the words of this song to reflect today’s scripture and I will sing it as a summary.

But for now, I invite you to imagine with me two things. First, imagine how Peter might describe this day’s experience with Jesus - including how he was thinking and how he was feeling. And second, imagine with me some ways Peter might suggest how we might identify with his experience of Jesus calling him to try again, to go out into the deep and to let down his net for a catch. So now, from the perspective of Peter.

Good morning, my name is Peter. I want to tell you about the day Jesus called me to try again, to row out into the deep and to let down my net for a catch! At the time, I was in the fishing business with my brother Andrew and our partners James and John. They had one boat & crew and Andrew and I had another.

I don’t know how familiar you are with net fishing, but let me tell you, casting large, weighted nets into the water, then hauling them back in again, repeatedly for hours on end, is hard work. We worked at night as nighttime was the best time to catch fish this way.

On this morning, we came back from a long night of hard work very tired, discouraged and frustrated. We had fished all night long ... and caught nothing. But before we could go home, we had to clean our nets, in preparation for the next night’s work.

As we were nearing land, I noticed a large crowd had gathered on the bank. As we got closer, I recognized the man speaking to them was Jesus. More and more people seemed to be

coming to hear him, pressing him closer and closer to the water's edge. I hoped he would be okay.

I was a follower of Jesus. I had listened to his teachings and witnessed his miracles. One time when Jesus visited in my home, he even healed my mother-in-law. As word spread in my neighbourhood more and more people came to be healed. I had said "yes" when he asked me to be one of his followers.

When we finally reached shore, we pulled up our boats and began to wash the weeds etc. caught in our net. Just as we finished, Jesus saw my boat at the edge of the water and climbed into it. He asked if I would row him out a little way from shore, so he could speak to the people from my boat -sort of like a floating pulpit. Since I always enjoyed listening to him, I agreed even though I was exhausted. We put our nets back into the boat and rowed out a little way from shore. Jesus continued to teach the people from my boat. He talked about how much God loves each one of us. He talked about stepping out in faith, and about trusting God to meet our needs, as we share God's love with others.

When he was finished speaking to the crowd, he turned to me and said, "Row the boat out into the deep water and let your nets down for a catch. I couldn't believe he was asking me to go out and try again! All I wanted to do was go home to bed and he wanted me to try again! I argued that we had worked hard all night long and had not caught a thing. It wasn't worth it. But, out of respect for him, I grudgingly said I would do what he asked, all the while thinking to myself, "This is going to be a big waste of time and energy."

Boy was I in for a surprise! It never crossed my mind that having Jesus with me would make such a difference! Once we got out into the deep waters, we let down our net and soon felt a pull on the net like we never felt before. When I realized our net was so full of fish that it was about to break, I signalled my partners, James and John to come and help us. We filled both boats so full they almost sank. We could hardly believe the size of our catch!

But then, all I could think about was how I had doubted Jesus. I didn't believe we would catch any fish after catching nothing all night long. I didn't expect having Jesus with me would make

a difference. I realized that I had really messed up. I felt so ashamed I couldn't look him in the eye. I fell onto my knees in front of him. I didn't feel worthy to even be near him. So, I asked him to go away from me as I was a sinner.

He surprised me by his response. He didn't scold me for my lack of faith. Instead, he simply said, "Don't be afraid." I was puzzled. What did Jesus think I was afraid of? Was I afraid of trusting in someone other than myself? Was I afraid of his power? Was I afraid of what he might ask of me next? Was I afraid of messing up again? Was I afraid of the unknown?

I had no time to come to any conclusion because Jesus went on to say "from now on you will catch people." From what he had taught us earlier, it was clear that we were to catch people's attention by showing and telling them that God loves them.

While I wasn't sure what lay ahead, I did know I wanted to listen to and learn more from Jesus. I wanted to experience more of God's love, and learn how to better share God's love with others. When I decided to say "yes" to Jesus the peace I experienced in relinquishing control to Jesus, is indescribable.

So, we pulled our boats up onto the shore, left everything that was familiar – our occupations, our families, our understanding of scripture, our ways of thinking and doing things, to go deeper with Jesus in learning how to catch people's attention by showing and telling them about God's love.

As you listened to my story I wonder if you identified with any of my experiences. E.g. Can you identify with feeling discouraged like I did when I didn't catch any fish all night long. Possibly you felt with a certain subject at school, or possibly with your job, or even with your retirement? You did your best but things didn't turn out the way you expected?

Maybe you have been discouraged with your relationship with God, or with one of your spiritual practices like prayer or reading the bible.

Maybe you have been discouraged with a relationship with someone in your family, a friend, a neighbour, or enemy.

Maybe you have been discouraged in discerning how God may be calling you to work for peace and justice. e.g. in the Middle East, or between Russia & Ukraine. Possibly peace and justice for LGBTQ people or Indigenous people or for persons struggling with mental health and/or addictions. Or, how to make peace with creation.

When tired and discouraged, have you ever felt God calling you to try again when you were ready to give up. Did you ever make excuses trying to avoid saying “yes” like I did?

Have you ever felt God calling you to go deeper into the unknown? To change or give up the way you are doing something or the way you are thinking about something. Have you felt God calling you to try something new? Possibly something totally out of your control or comfort zone. Maybe something that sounds crazy or impractical?

Have you ever felt sinful or ashamed like I did because you didn't trust God or expect anything to change regardless of what you did. Maybe you felt ashamed when you were surprised when God did answer a prayer in the way you wanted.

Have you ever felt you were too sinful or just not good enough ... or gifted enough ... for God to use? I think it is important for us to discern and respond to God's unique call for each one of us as none of us is called to do everything but each of us is called to do something.

While I had to ask my partners for help in bringing in the fish maybe you need to ask for help in discerning what are the deep waters you are being called to and who are the people God is calling you to show and tell about God's love.

The good news is that our God is a God who uses ordinary, imperfect people like you and me to build the kingdom of God. Just look at how God used me and his other followers on the day

of Pentecost to tell of the wonders of God in ways the people could understand no matter where they came from, resulting in over 3,000 new believers!

I believe each one of you individually and as a congregation are called as it were to row into the deep with Jesus and let down your nets for a catch just as I was. You may not be called to leave behind occupations and family like I was but you may be asked to leave behind your priorities, your plans, your understanding of scripture and your way of thinking and doing things for the sake of participating in building the kingdom of God.

I pray that when Jesus calls you into the deep you too, will say “Yes” and experience God’s peace as I did. Thank you for listening to my story.

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And now for the recap

Peter, James & John in their sailboats, 3x. Out on the deep blue sea.

Fished all night and caught no fish (3x) coming home very discouraged

Jesus asked Peter to row into the deep. (3x) and drop his net for a catch

Peter finally did what Jesus asked, (3x) but thought it was a waste of time.

When they caught a net full of fish (3x) Peter became aware of his sin

Jesus said don’t be afraid (3x) now you will catch people with my love

Peter left all that was familiar (3x) and experienced the peace of Christ.