

Epiphany 5C¹
Peace, Seattle
February 10, 2019
Luke 5:1-11, Isaiah 6:1-8

THE CALL TO GO DEEPER

You could see the hunger in their faces as they gathered around Jesus on the shore that morning. Nobody wanted to miss a single syllable. As the crowds grew they kept pressing toward him, until he felt the waves lapping over his sandals.

The solution was simple: Two boats bobbed there near the shore. He hopped into one and asked its owner, Simon, to put out a little ways.

This wasn't the first time Simon had met Jesus. A few days before he'd been in the synagogue when Jesus commanded a demon spirit out of a man.

Impressed by what he'd seen, he invited Jesus to join his family that day for Sabbath meal, and not only did he come—he cured Simon's mother-in-law that very day! One minute she was flush with fever, and the next she was serving them supper.

Being around Jesus had given Simon Peter a lot to think about. But, when the new week rolled around, the contemplation went on hold as Simon went back to fishing.

You know how you can tell if it's been a good fishing day? By how your hands feel. The more they hurt, the better the catch. That morning, Simon Peter's hands felt just fine.

When Jesus hopped in his boat and asked him to put out a ways, Simon thought, EH, WHY NOT? There are no fish to clean; only empty nets.

He couldn't pinpoint when it happened, but at some point that morning, Simon stopped thinking about fishing and started focusing on what Jesus was saying.

The next thing he knew, the sun was straight up, and Jesus was done teaching. It was then that Jesus said:

ROW OUT TO THE DEEPER WATER AND LET DOWN YOUR NETS.

Now if you've ever had the experience of receiving orders from a person you consider unqualified to give them, then you know what Simon Peter felt like.

What business did Jesus have telling a fisherman how to fish? It was the heat of the day. The gear was cleaned, mended, and stowed. And besides, even if there were any fish to be had, they'd be much too deep for the nets this time of day. The whole thing would be an exercise in futility.

AND YET, Simon had never encountered a man like Jesus before. It was hard not to take orders from him, even if Jesus didn't know what he was talking about.

So, after letting Jesus know just how pointless the exercise would be, Peter signaled his partners and they put out to where the water was deep, and let their nets down.

¹ Worship on 2/10/2019 was cancelled due to a significant snow storm and road conditions. I ended up preaching this sermon the following week, using the appointed texts for 2/10/19.

You know what happened next. They caught so many fish that their nets began to tear. So many that both boats were nearly swamped. By the time they hauled it all in, their hands were hurting big time.

But here's the weird part: as all this is happening Simon Peter, instead of being totally psyched about the catch of a lifetime, falls at Jesus' feet and begs:

GO AWAY, LORD, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN.

DON'T BE AFRAID, says Jesus, FROM NOW ON YOU'LL BE CATCHING PEOPLE.

What is this story about? What does it have to do with you and me? Three points.

FIRST: The call to follow Jesus comes smack dab in the middle of our daily lives.

For Simon Peter, that means being called in the middle of fishing.

For you or me it means being called while we're going about our daily work, whether that work is in a classroom, at home, at a computer terminal, in a small business, as a volunteer. . . WHEREVER.

Wherever we find ourselves in the rhythm of our daily life, Jesus comes to us with an invitation.

For some, answering this call means leaving the familiar and heading out in a new direction. For Peter, answering the call meant leaving his nets and the catch of a lifetime behind.

For others, the call to follow Jesus means staying right where we are, but seeing our relationships and going about our tasks with a renewed sense of purpose, attitude, and commitment that says:

I WILL EMBODY IN MY CONDUCT THE KIND OF COMPASSION AND FAIRNESS,
DEDICATION AND JOY THAT BEFITS ONE WHO IS APPRENTICED TO JESUS CHRIST.

The call to follow Jesus comes right in the middle of our daily lives and routines. And in order to recognize that call when it comes—('cause it may not always be as clear for us as it was for Peter), we need to cultivate a kind of disciplined openness; and a prayerful expectancy that waits for God.

When radio host Joshua Johnson interviewed the creators of the new film, SPIDERMAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE last week, and asked them what advice they'd give to aspiring young artists, Christopher Miller replied:

"You've got 10,000 bad drawings inside of you and you've got to get them out as quickly as possible." So the more pencil miles you put behind you, the more practice you get, the better you'll be."²

Disciplined openness.

² Joshua Johnson is the host of the program 1A. The co-creators are Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, and Peter Ramsey. Christopher Miller offered this response, using a quote from a teacher of illustrator Chuck Jones. The whole 1-A *Spider-Verse* podcast can be found here: <https://the1a.org/shows/2019-02-12/into-the-spiderverse>

Over the past two weeks our family has spent a lot of time around doctors, and one of the things I've come to appreciate and understand more deeply than ever is this notion of doctors PRACTICING medicine. Harborview is a TEACHING hospital, and when doctors came to see Kai it wasn't uncommon for them to be accompanied by a cluster of medical students—the doctors' apprentices.

Learning to practice medicine requires a high level of commitment and discipline—and sacrifice; what Eugene Peterson, in his book on the Psalms calls "A long obedience in the same direction."³

Do doubt Simon Peter had put in countless hours and many years practicing the art of fishing. By now he could clean those nets blindfolded!

But this experience with Jesus, the summons to GO DEEPER, humbled him, showing him that, when all was said and done, when it came to LIFE he was still a novice; that he was being summoned by Jesus to take his first vocation – fishing – and become apprenticed to a new way of using it in the world.

As servants of Jesus who've waded in the waters, we are called to that kind of obedience and expectancy; called to show up spiritually as well as physically and mentally, and to remain open to the possibility that at any given moment, in any given context, Jesus may issue an invitation for us to follow him.

POINT TWO:

If you feel an inner reluctance to say YES to God's call, fear not! You're in good company!

When those breaking nets opened Peter's eyes he knew he was in the presence of something sacred and it humbled him: GO AWAY LORD, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN!

The same thing happened to the prophet Isaiah:

WOE IS ME! He cried, FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS...
YET MY EYES HAVE SEEN THE LORD OF HOSTS!

It happened to Moses, too, and Gideon, and Jeremiah.

Each offered reasons why they couldn't accept God's CALL; each thought his personal limitations were too big to be overcome. And in each case, God proved them wrong.

They became instruments of God's purposes in spite of their limitations. God's strength was made perfect in their weakness.

With Simon on his knees, Jesus' first words to him are: DON'T BE AFRAID.

When I think of times I've avoided doing the right thing for fear for the consequences, for fear for what others might think, for fear for what it may cost me, I feel ashamed.

But in Jesus, I've come face to face with a love that casts out shame and fear.

DO NOT BE AFRAID, he says. I AM WITH YOU. I HAVE WASHED YOU...YOU ARE MINE.

These words of Jesus do more than console. They transform.

Touched by that live coal, Isaiah's attitude is transformed, from "Woe is me!" to: HERE I AM, LORD! SEND ME!

³ *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.* (Intervarsity Press, 2000)

ONE FINAL POINT: The call to follow Jesus is a call to move out into deeper water.

- The shoreline may be safer.
- The shallow water may be less risky.
- No doubt we'd feel much less vulnerable if we never go in over our heads.

But that's not where Christ calls us to be. He calls us to deeper water; deeper risk; deeper life.

Some of you here today are experiencing changes in your life, and you're wondering what those changes mean and where your life is headed.

Maybe you're wondering, too, how God is mixed up in it all.

You're wading into deeper water and wondering whether you've got it within you to meet the challenges ahead.

Today the answer rings out loud and clear:

GO AHEAD, PUT OUT INTO THOSE DEEP WATERS. TRUST ME, AND DON'T BE AFRAID. I'M RIGHT BESIDE YOU. AND I'LL REMAIN HERE WITH YOU. ALWAYS.

The God we meet in Jesus is the God who's with us for the duration...all the way through the alley, (as our dear brother Al Drackert used to say.)

At the Font he claims us; at the Table he nourishes, so we might follow him wherever that following may take us, confident that we are not alone.

Thanks be to God! Amen.