

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, Rector
at Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
on The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C
February 10, 2019**

Luke 5:1-11

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."

An English Bishop tells a story about a visit to the Church in a foreign land. On his arrival he was taught a local greeting. You don't just say hello or how are you doing with a handshake or even Peace be with you. The proper greeting is "***I see you.***" The response is "***I am here.***" I see you, I am here. It is almost as if until you see me – I don't exist. When you recognize the other person you give each other life. A person is a person because of other people. (Zulu proverb)

Jesus seemed to have the ability to notice the little things, the details. He also seemed to notice the little people – the ones society tended to overlook or neglect or exclude. He noticed the widow and her mite at the Temple. He noticed the woman who touched the hem of his garment in the crowds. He noticed little Zaccheus, the lame and diseased, the outcast and stranger and the sinner – and he loved them all. (Bishop Michael Marshall)

In our gospel today we hear that Jesus *noticed* Simon and the other fishermen and the difficulty they faced. They had worked all night and had caught nothing. He told them to cast their nets into the deep waters. At that point, Simon Peter was likely to have uttered some version of the two deadliest phrases in a church: ***We've always done it this way*** or ***we tried that before and it didn't work.***

Why would experienced, professional fishermen, after a night of futility, listen to a carpenter's son? It may have been something in his teaching that was attractive. Simon and the others no doubt heard it as they were mending their nets and egos. Maybe Simon was attentive because Jesus had healed his mother-in-law not long before this encounter. He noticed and showed compassion and love when they were most needed.

Whatever the reasons, they *did* cast their nets into the deep waters and brought in a miraculous, overflowing catch of fish. It was at ***that*** point that Simon Peter ***saw*** Jesus for who *he* is – as his Lord – and he promptly fell to his knees. 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." That is, they ***abandoned*** the miraculous catch, their boats and what they knew – to follow their Lord. It was a ***mutual*** recognition that transformed a common man into a disciple of Jesus.

Today's gospel is about the call – a call to follow and serve and ultimately an invitation to love and be loved by God. It is about the beginning of the transformation of ordinary people into visionary disciples of Jesus. Later, they go on to catch people – but not before they themselves are caught and transformed by Christ. At this point in the story they are just ordinary people taking their first tentative, stumbling steps of faith.

What do we mean when we speak of a call in the Church? It is a loaded theological term. Does it mean a direct experience of God? Is it a *sign* like a burning bush or a still small voice?

Is it in the community recognizing a gift in us we had not seen? It may take any of these forms. In essence, a call is always an invitation to enter more deeply into a relationship with Christ. It is an invitation to love and be loved by God. A call is a recognition that God not only accepts us, but chooses us.

God extends a call to *all* people. We tend to think of a “*call*” in terms of ordination but that is rather limited. Simon Peter would have *never* made it through an ordination process in The Episcopal Church. For most it is a call to baptism or marriage or service or mission – to serve our neighbors right where we are. Were Peter and the other disciples better, smarter, more gifted or faithful than anyone else? Probably not – they were extraordinarily ordinary. But what Simon and the others had was a simple yet powerful trust in Jesus. More than any other gift – the first disciples received an awareness that they were seen and loved by God.

Jesus did not set out with a master plan or set of techniques or form a committee. He introduced people to the possibility of God in the normal ebb and flow of life. – At synagogue, in homes, at a meal or while people were going about their daily work – fishing, in this case. In *our* case, we might recognize and serve those in ways that use our particular gifts. Study after study show that most people come to church because a friend or relative invited them. Because we have found a community of love and acceptance we can invite others. It is an imperfect one to be sure but one that seeks after God. We are a *Church for* imperfect people – those trying to be good and by the grace of God made holy in Christ.

God always uses the tools at hand to do the divine work of reconciliation. In this case, us. Our vocation or call is *not* to go and collect a multitude of fish. That is *God’s* work. Our call is to be faithful right where we are. That is, to enter more fully into the heart of Christ. We are relieved of the burden to be successful in this endeavor.

One preacher claimed that we put a special, Episcopal twist on being called to be fishers of people. We are called to cast our nets into the deep waters to share the good news of Jesus. But instead, we put little buckets on the shore and hope some fish will swim by and jump in. (Bishop Michael Marshall) That’s not far from the truth. Invite someone who needs what you have found here.

Rowan Williams says that “...one effect of Christian believing is always seeing the world in a new way – seeing *beyond* the surface without letting go of what’s actually there *on* the surface...” (From Tokens of Trust) Our call as disciples is to look on and beyond the surface and see others as God does – past the practiced façade into the depths – into the joy, the pain, and the hope. We share that good news with the world that we have known – that God sees you. You are valued, you matter, you are loved. This story reminds us, God not only accepts you, God chooses you.