

Sermon for Sunday February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1-11

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

It was only 10 am in the morning when I thought of Simon – the Simon of our Gospel lesson. It was minus something ridiculous, and I had tried to get the car started at 8:40 but it wasn't going anywhere. A few minutes earlier I had been listening to the CBC news - there was a report about the mess in Ottawa - which hurt my heart - and another about Mr. Moe's decision, to drop vaccine passports and other restrictions, in the not too distant future – based on some people's opinion but not medical opinion. A decision that means my future is about to get even more complicated as my day-to-day life will become more unsafe with my not so efficient immune system. So, the difficult daily news was landing rather heavy on my shoulders. Beyond all this I needed to get to the office. I had the cake that was to be offered up as part of the Birthday celebration for one of our office volunteers and I had a sermon in desperate need of some work. Also Joye Binnie would be waiting for me to arrive at the church as we had arranged a time to record her reading of scripture. After my second attempt to start the car failed - I was sitting there in my living room, sorting through my options when Simon the dude from the Gospel lesson, came to mind. I thought of Simon standing in the waters cleaning his nets.

Simon had not had a good day. He had been fishing all night and into the early morning and he had nothing to show for it. I imagined him standing there feeling the heaviness of his failed fishing efforts, standing there, soiled nets in hand, sorting through his options.

My hunch is that we have all had a few moments during these past two years of endless challenges, when we have felt a bit "beat up" by life, felt overwhelmed or a bit wounded. My hunch is that we have all had moments standing there feeling the heaviness of our times, with emptiness in our hearts, sorting through our options. I think we might have some real life experience that helps us understand what Simon must have felt - that day, knee deep in the waters of lake Gen - nes - aret. //

It was into this heavy moment in Simon's life that our Jesus wanders, with problems of his own. He has been teaching and talking about God. Jesus has been talking about radical things, like the power of love and about how the first shall be last and the last first and about how there are no throw away people and he is igniting a new thing in the people. The people want to hear more, they want to know more, see more and so they have followed Jesus to the lake shore. Which is great but there are so many people! So in order to keep from being overwhelmed by the crowd Jesus borrows a boat – asks to be pushed out a bit from the shore and from this more comfortable spot, with the people sitting on the beach listening, Jesus continues to teach.

It seems that Simon and his friends were not using the boats. They had been using them, but they had had a rough day – fishing without anything to show for it. Now tired and disappointed, standing in the shallow water they were cleaning their empty nets. Though they must have caught something for the nets to be dirty – maybe a

rubber boot, an old tire or maybe some lake weeds. What ever they caught or didn't catch the nets needed some attention.

I wonder what they heard while standing there, knee deep in the water, what story was Jesus telling, what truth was he speaking? //

What ever Jesus was saying it must have been good because I don't think Simon would have taken Jesus' fishing advice if he had not heard something important in Jesus' address to the people on the shore. My hunch is that he would not have taken Jesus' advice to try - one more time - throwing the nets in the deep water - if he had not seen or heard something of value from this rather popular roving preacher.

The story tells us that Simon was not excited about the prospect of heading out to fish again - no doubt he was anticipating the same result - no fish, and then once again having to clean the nets - a task he just completed. But there must have been something, something in what Jesus said to the crowd, something in the way Jesus looked at him, something made him do what Jesus instructed.

I wonder what it was?

What ever it was that inspired Simon to do what Jesus asked it meant Simon and his fellow fishers had to head out into the deep waters. The more difficult waters, unknown waters, the often turbulent waters. For this is the kind of waters you find in the deep.

The story tells us that doing as Jesus instructed, choosing to head out into those deep waters, well it nearly sank the whole lot of them. The story tells us that the fisher fellows returned to the shore, nearly drowned, wet, weary and overwhelmed by the size of the catch. Overwhelmed by the whole experience no doubt and something had changed. It inspired Simon to take a good hard look at his life and what ever he found there it caused him to fall at Jesus knees and tell him the truth about his living. Simon made confession, expressing in no uncertain terms that he was not worthy.

I wonder if Simon might have heard, from someone he cared about, the words that many of us have heard in the course of our living. "You'll never amount to anything." And it is the fear that they are right that causes Simon and us to shrink away. Imagine, if Jesus, upon hearing Simon's confession, had said, "You are so right, Simon! What in the world am I thinking! You are a sinner. You will never do. You are no good to me. I will have to find someone else."

Just think! There would be no Simon Peter, the rock, on whom the church is founded; no Simon who shows us over and over again that it is flawed individuals, those who boast of Christ and those who deny Christ - these are the individuals on whom Jesus depends to do his work in this world. It is upon folks just like me and you that Jesus depends to do his work in this world.

It reminds me of the quote by Marianne Williamson that Nelson Mandela made famous:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God, and your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we

let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Jesus does not leave Simon on his knees. Jesus will not buy into his feelings of unworthiness or inadequacy. Jesus liberates Simon from his fear, hears him and tells him to leave his fear behind and offers him the opportunity to be part of something new. Something transformative.

It seems to me that Jesus is inviting us to do the same - to use our imaginations rather than to remain stuck in ruts. To lean into what is possible even if it takes us into the deep waters and to believe we are worthy of what ever new thing God is doing.

You see, the power we place in the thoughts of our unworthiness is the biggest fish tale of all. Instead of the same old way of doing things - instead of the same false way of thinking about ourselves, Jesus says, "Go into the deep! Cast your nets on the other side! Be fishers of men and women!" And because Jesus has taken us into the deep to cast the nets far and wide, we are all caught up - the worthy and the unworthy, the good and the not so good, the beautiful and the ugly, all caught by His nets of grace and liberated to do His work of casting abundant love into the world.

It's okay if you have been having a rough day or even a rough couple of years. Our Gospel lesson teaches us that we have a companion on these rough waters that encourages us to keep trying even if the waters are deep. We have a friend that sees our worth and calls us to serve others caught in the undertow of life and to bring them to the shore where they can rest and renew and get ready to head out themselves to witness to the transformative power of grace.

Amen

Benediction:

May the companionship of God - shape us into community

May the peace of God fill us with hope and joy.

And may the love of God embrace us and
strengthen us to serve

even when the waters are deep and the catch unsure.

Amen.

Rev. Debra Berg

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He 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." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So 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. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and 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." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.