

Sermon for Epiphany 5C
Sunday, February 6, 2022
“Go deep and fish for people”

Text: Luke 5:1-11

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I will make you fishers of men,
Fishers of men,
Fishers of men.
I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.*

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Today’s gospel reminds me of that cute little song that we used to sing in Sunday School when I was young. Like a great number of songs children sing in Sunday School, this one included movement. The teacher divided us into two groups: usually the girls were fishers and the boys were men. Whenever we sang the word “fishers,” the girls would leap up, and whenever we sang the word “men,” the boys would leap up. We would repeat the song several times, faster and faster each time until we could no longer articulate the words. We looked like a room full of popcorn in a popcorn popper, but we had a lot of fun nonetheless. Reflecting back on that Sunday School experience, it occurs to me that we were doing in that song exactly what today’s gospel is trying to teach us: that Jesus Christ calls us to change our lives and be his active disciples.

Simon Peter and the two brothers, James and John sons of Zebedee, were fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, and they were having a bad day at work, because despite their efforts all day, they hadn’t caught any fish. Then along came Jesus who told them to move farther out into the deeper water and try again. When they took his advice they caught so many fish that the abundance started breaking their nets. Then Jesus offered them a new opportunity to give up fishing for fish, follow him, and fish for people. Imagine quitting your job, or giving up everything you own, leaving everyone you love to follow someone you hardly knew. That’s exactly what Simon Peter and the two brothers James and John sons of Zebedee did.

And just who was this Jesus who just asked them to give up everything they knew to follow him? According to Luke’s Gospel, this episode from Jesus’ life and ministry happened after the failed attempts to do any great works in his hometown that we heard about the last two Sundays; and, remember last week, by the end, the people of

Nazareth wanted to throw him off a cliff. But in between that event and today's story on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus passed through the city of Capernaum, and while he was there, he cast a demon out of a man outside the synagogue; interestingly, that demon immediately recognized Jesus as "the Holy One of God." Right after that, Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law who was suffering from a fever and began a wave of curings and casting out demons—demons who, according to St. Luke, all recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. So, by the time Jesus reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee, also called Gennesaret, Jesus had built up quite a reputation. It doesn't seem so far fetched that those fisherman would suddenly give up their livelihood and leave their homes and families to follow a guy who did all those miraculous acts in the Capernaum and helped them find a great catch of fish. They were willing to become Jesus's disciples and, later, apostles, to spread the message of Jesus Christ to the world. Jesus met them where they were, on the Sea of Galilee, where they made their living as fishermen and called them out of their occupation into vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin '*vocare*' which means 'to call.' Jesus called those ordinary men into something new and extra-ordinary; he called those fishermen into a new life as fishers for people.

Jesus's call to vocation reminds us that the struggle toward God's kingdom is not for some future time or place, but for the here and now. Jesus called ordinary men (and women) out of their occupation as fishermen into vocation as fishers of people. Jesus called them from within the context of what they knew best. We, too, are to be fishers of people, just like those first disciples, and that we are to do ministry in the context of our own ordinary lives. You can proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ at home, at work, with your friends, with people you meet in stores, or at the doctor's office, or on the bus, wherever you go. That doesn't mean you have to go around with a Bible in your hand bludgeoning people with God's word, but just let the light of Christ shine within you in all that you do.

The other message that today's gospel offers happens in the way the story unfolds. A mob of people started crowding around Jesus, presumably others seeking healing and desiring to hear more words of wisdom from Jesus, so he got into a boat with some of his friends and continued to teach. His friends had had a slow day catching fish. They had toiled all night long, worked their fingers to the bone, and caught nothing. Then Jesus told them to go out into deeper waters, where they, in fact, found an abundance of fish. Their catch was poor until they ventured out into the deeper waters. Often times we need to take a risk and venture out into deeper waters in order to find the abundance that God has waiting for us. If we keep doing things in the same way or don't grab onto opportunities that may be out of our comfort zone, we're not going to see much change in our lives, and we are likely to keep making the same mistakes. It's not until we take a chance, move our boats into deeper waters, cast our nets in water that might frighten us or make us uncomfortable, but it's in those scary places that God

does his best work and blesses us with the most satisfying abundance. If anyone had told me three years ago that we'd be live streaming our services, I wouldn't have believed it, and I am repeatedly being surprised to hear from the people we are reaching, some in far away places, the people who are being blessed by our ministry of word and sacrament, more people than we were reaching when we just depended on them coming to worship here in person. We are at a time in our ministry here when we can't be afraid to accept that many of our members and others who are seeking a community of believers connect with us on YouTube or Facebook live. I have to be comfortable that there are folks who are worshipping in their bathrobes with coffee or tea in hand, but at least they are hearing the Gospel and gazing upon the Sacraments.

Sometimes we may have a bad day when it seems like nothing is working out, when it seems like we try and try and try, but nothing seems to be getting better. Nothing in our life is changing. We keep making the same mistakes and we find ourselves in the same rut. But, if we'd only let Jesus get into our boat. If we'd only let him motivate us to venture out into the deeper water—it may be out of our comfort zone, it may be seem like we aren't ready to handle it, we may feel like we don't have what it takes—but if we take the risk, there's an abundance of fish out there waiting for us. The answer we didn't expect that will get us out of the rut of our lives is out there waiting for us to discover. The means to give us more security that we long for is waiting to be captured. The recharging of our broken spirits is waiting to be plugged into. The relief for our ailments is waiting to be found. The inspiration, love, comfort, and healing that someone else is desperately looking for is out there in the deeper waters where we just might be the very person they needed to talk to or meet that day.

We must trust God, let him take us out to the deeper water where we will find his love, his grace, his mercy, his comfort, his kindness, and his awesome power. And if we tell our story about how God showed up in our boat and brought us to the abundance waiting for us, we, too will be fishers of men. Amen.