

“Going into the Deep Water”

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11

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If you have been around the church for any length of time, you have heard your share of sermons. And there are variety of formats for a sermon...one classic type is, of course, “three points and a poem.” However, there are multiple sermon formats. There are sermons that are verse-by-verse explanations; there are sermons that are like looking at the facets of a diamond, where the preacher looks at a theme or a text from several different directions. Then there are sermons are a matter of problem-solving—the problem is laid out and the resources of Scripture address the problem.

Today’s sermon follows another format, a less-used format, of called “synchronicity.” The word means “bringing time together.” You are probably most familiar with the verb form of this word: to synchronize, which means to check your watches and get them all on the same time...to bring time together. Today’s sermon is a matter of “synchronicity”—overlaying the Biblical story with our story...and our story with the Biblical story. So first, let us hear the Biblical story (Luke 5:1-11).

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He 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. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So 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. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and 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.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

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There we were, washing our nets after a night of working. And, as so often is the case, Jesus dropped by while we were doing other things. All he asked was to stand in one of our boats so he could talk to the crowd. And that was easy enough; you know, we were not going to be using the boat that morning. Our work was done; we were putting things away.

Isn’t it great when you can help someone else out and not have to go to any trouble! Our boat was going to be docked at the shore anyway. So we could continue to wash our nets, listen to Jesus teach the crowd, and be doing Jesus a favor all at the same time—that is multi-tasking at its best. It is like the friend I have who ran an annual golf tournament that raised money for a homeless shelter and for Family Promise (what we know as Interfaith Hospitality Network). He called the tournament, “Golf for Good.” You got to play golf, raise some money, and raise awareness of homeless shelter needs. Golf for good!

Sometimes what Jesus asks of us is so easy...just let him on our boat for awhile as we go on with our own plans...just let him into our regular lives... to “Dock for Good” instead of “Golf for good.” But sometimes what Jesus asks is hard. We had finished washing our nets; our work was done; time to relax and take it easy. We were “off-duty.” And Jesus says, “Put out into the deep water and let your nets down for a catch.”

Go back out? We had just worked all night and caught nothing. No offense, but what did this carpenter’s son know about the fishing business anyway? We know our business; we know what will work and will not work. We do not need anyone, not even Jesus, telling us how to do business.

I don’t do it for you but sometimes I do the right thing for the wrong reason...just because I have to do so, just because someone is nagging me to do so, just because someone is watching, just because I should. There is no spirit of “good” in it. Doing it simply as Simon Peter said, “If you say so, Jesus.”

“If you say so...” and then, when we were just going through the motions and not expecting anything, the nets overflow with fish. And it was too much for one boat, we needed others to come and assist. We were only doing what we were supposed to do (and if Jesus asks us, we are supposed to do it). We had no expectation; in fact, we were downright resistant but we did it anyway. And God smiled on us.

Simon, of course, responded to this abundance in the way that shows us the way to follow. Seeing the great catch, he can only say, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Simon knew we had only been going through the motions of doing the right thing; our heart had not been in it. We had followed the letter of the instructions but had no spirit in it. And still God had smiled on us. What I usually do in those situations is take credit for myself. After all, I had done the right thing by following Jesus’ instruction. I could easily shift the credit on to me—I did it; it is my victory.

But Simon showed us the true way. We had only been going through the motions and God still smiled on us. And it was a God-thing...not a human thing. It was grace and not reward for our efforts. Simon tells Jesus the truth, “Lord, we really do not deserve to be in your presence,” when we were doing something just because you told us to.

And at that point, with that massive catch of fish, Jesus could have said those immortal, true-but-distancing words. Jesus could have said, “I told you so...I told you so.” And that would have been right but increased the distance between Jesus and us. Jesus will not follow Simon’s instructions to “go away” or put distance between himself and us.

We, who have done the right thing reluctantly... we who have been blessed beyond measure...we who know beneath our self-righteousness there is some much good that not of our doing—we are tempted to distance ourselves from Jesus. To say, “You can’t really want me around.” However, Jesus keeps saying, “Do not be afraid.” And, more than fish or other abundance, do not be afraid of the real catch he has for us...the real catch is other people. We can get so caught up in things to do, the schedule, the expectations, “have-tos” that have no spirit in them. And when grace overflows, it is not about what we have accomplished on our own. It is not about Jesus saying, “I told you so.” It is not even about the blessing of the good catch. It is about preparing us to catch people. Jesus

keeps preparing for us relationships. God's blessings are about preparing us for relationships...to be blessing to others.

Two Sundays ago, when we had our guests from Knox Fellowship here, one of the leaders, Margo Elliott, told of her daily ritual, a morning prayer before getting out of bed. Each morning she would say, "Lord, there is someone today for whom I can provide a witness. There is someone today that needs an expression of your love." And so she was looking for that person each day.

I knew that already! Jesus had already told you and me to do that. I have heard those instructions from Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel, with that conclusion to go out into the whole world and make disciples and teach them all that he has commanded us. I have heard those directions in John's Gospel as Jesus tells his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." And the book of Acts begins with Jesus telling his followers that they are to be his witnesses...in Jerusalem, where they lived...in Samaria, a place they did not like to go...and even to the ends of the earth (and I guess that includes Knoxville, Tennessee). Blessed for relationships—catching people.

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So, here is where we are today:

- Do good when it is easy—sometimes we just need to let Jesus on board...to dock for good.
- Do what he says to do, even when it is hard. Grace will surprise us.
- And, do not be afraid, we will share in and spread the faith in our relationships to others.