

Luke 5:1-11
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“Radical Trust, Growing Faith”

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In Bible Study this past Tuesday we learned archeologists found a first-century boat from the Sea of Galilee. The boat 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet high gives us a pretty good idea of the size of Simon Peter’s fishing boat. This boat would have held a lot of fish and it would have taken a whole lot of fish to sink it. This story where Jesus tells the fishermen to set out one last time and go deeper is a story about the mystery and magnificence of God’s abundance.

In our faith story we find Jesus watching Simon Peter and several others washing their nets after a night of fishing. Deeply frustrated, these lifelong, professional fishermen were finally giving up after they had been out all night and caught nothing.

It is believed that 8 of Jesus’ disciples were professional fishermen. This means they used the proper night net called a trammel, they knew the best times and the best places in the lake to fish, if fishing could be thought of as a science these guys would have won the National Medal of Science for fishing. They practically never came home empty.

But this morning we find them tired, disappointed and empty handed; back on the shore washing their nets. fishing provided livelihood for their families, it also provided food for the entire town and was an important commodity to trade with other communities nearby. These fishermen were feeling the full brunt of having just let down not only their families, but their friends and neighbors also.

They had exercised all their skill, all their intuition, all their experience, all their training, all their knowledge and nothing they did worked. Nothing had let them to catch even one fish. And in THAT moment, Jesus says “take me for a ride,” set out into the deep and cast your nets one more time.

So, perhaps the first miracle in this story is... without questioning him, without arguing with him, without rehashing how horrible it felt to catch nothing, without even wondering why in the world this Carpenter might think he knows where fish are when the professional fishermen could not find them. That morning, they loaded their night fishing nets back onto the boat, climbed aboard and set out. Jesus tells them, “cast out into the deep water.” And they did... doing so took raw trust.

And we know the next miracle, the nets were so filled with fish they were tearing, the boats so overflowing with the catch they were sinking. Jesus is teaching that in those moments we finally realize we cannot rely merely on our own resources of expertise, experience and intuition to secure our future... the very second, we begin to sense that we have little control over our own future, we take another step toward radical faith, and raw trust in God.

For people of faith these fishermen are not being silly at all. They are not being reckless with their limited resources. They are employing their conditional and limited resources in the service of God's abundance and placing full trust in the God who has the power to lead empty-handed fishermen to unimaginable abundance. We learn that in those times we have spent all the resources we have set aside, Jesus sometimes calls us to cast the net further.

In a capitalistic economy this type of faith is extremely counterintuitive. When resources have been expended and the catch is not caught, capitalism suggests we cut our losses, buckle down on our expenses, become cautionary about who we let into our boat, and here we mean the boat of our church, or our nation, and we set in a holding pattern until the next opportunity to try again. Our economic system teaches us to keep our reserve for when the tide turns around. Metaphorically casting our nets deeper in moments our resources are exhausted seems so counterintuitive that Christians need to develop prayers, meditations, and spiritual practices to help us take on this image of Jesus Christ.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery, a French writer, poet, aristocrat, journalist, and pioneering aviator once wrote, "If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Jesus makes this entire abundant catch a metaphor for the service he will call his disciples to as they become Catchers of people. The word Luke uses for "catching" had the meaning of "saving the lives of persons from danger." While there are certain models of evangelism the church has resisted, we cannot give up. We don't want to be in a position of hooking and dragging people into the church, we don't want to suggest they have to believe exactly the way we do or they are "less" Christian than us. But the work of evangelism doesn't have to suggest a manipulative approach. Scholar and Pastor Ann Svennungsen reminds us Jesus did not coerce people into discipleship, he (showed them the abundant love of God, intended for all of creation, and) invited and called them, she writes, "Evangelism isn't about convincing others of our truth, or getting them to accept our beliefs; it's the practice of sharing and living the Word that has transformed our lives with such grace and power that we can't help but tell the story." And she adds, "casting the net of God's love all around—open to the world—and then wait with patience for the Spirit's work and to see if any are caught by God's love..."

Someone talking about this story this week said, "I like that the image Jesus uses is net fishing, not throwing out a rod with a single line, this is a communal catch." I agree with them, in the presence and power of God we are coming for each other, and we won't stop. We are coming to catch each other when we are falling, coming to catch each other when our resources are expended, but to do so sometimes we have to be willing to cast out further.

As UCC pastor Rev. Kate Matthews writes, "I hope we remember this; that in the church we are never alone. We take these daring, risky, (counterintuitive) steps together. If Jesus chose to begin his ministry in the unexpected—and perhaps uncomfortable—place of Galilee, with all of its challenges and differences, then let us—with a mixture of fear and amazement, and

hope—step out, beyond the sturdy walls of our long-held assumptions, the protective walls of our familiar and comfortable and comforting (islands)... and exercise our imagination, our courage and our trust, to live in radical openness to all the epiphanies around us, all the wonders that challenge our everyday, measured, carefully controlled expectations.

The last thing those fishermen long ago were expecting was a showing of God’s awesome power right there, at the end of another workday.” Yet it completely transformed them revealing God’s goodness so clearly they followed Jesus anywhere he would go.

How might our every days hold the possibility of seeing God’s hand at work in our lives and all around us? Do we still believe Jesus still shows up and surprises us? How might God’s miracles be changing our lives forever?

Amen