

“Put Out Into Deep Water...”

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FCMF #2

Texts: Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, when the crowd pressed him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. He noticed two boats moored there at the shore; the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. 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 began to teach the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon replied, "Master, we have been hard at it all night long and have not caught a thing. But if you insist, I'll lower the nets."

So they did and netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear apart. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and lend a hand. They came and loaded both boats until they began to sink.

At the sight of this, Simon Peter fell to his knees in front of Jesus and said, "Have nothing to do with me, Master, as sinful as I am!" For he and his companions were stunned at the catch of fish that they had taken, as were James and John, sons of Zebedee and partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." They then brought their boats to shore, abandoned everything and followed him.

Sermon

This morning's passage is a story about something we call, "Call."

And like most stories in the Bible about calls it includes some drama.

As we recall, Abraham's call was the voice of God in the night
promising him a prodigious progeny

that would be as numerous as the stars.

For Moses it was a dramatic bush that burned
and burned with an unquenchable fire.

For Isaiah it was the overwhelming vision of six winged seraphs
gliding through the temple singing Holy, Holy, Holy
as they purified his lips with burning coals from the alter.

Sometimes it just has to be that way, I guess,

in order to get our attention, to get us serious
about getting out and getting on with the work
that God has selected us to accomplish.

Now as most of you know that I did my seminary training

at Howard University School of Divinity
an historically black college in Washington, DC.
I learned quickly that there are some major similarities
in the African American religious experience
that often transcend denominationalism.
One strong similarity was this thing called, "Call."
Most of my companions could recount a specific
and dramatic experience of their call to ministry!
Now I know from personal experience that sensing a true call
is important and can be source of needed inspiration
especially when one's ministry hits a rocky patch.

This morning's passage is specifically about the calls
of the disciples, Peter, James and John.
And though there are ways that these calls diverge
from those other accounts we find in the Bible,
there is at least one striking similarity that
I would like to focus on this morning.
In nearly all of the calls that we find in scripture
the initial response by the "Callee"
is an overwhelming sense of unworthiness.
But once the "Callee" has figured out that the "Caller" is God,
and that it is God who is behind this attempt to catch their attention,
expressions of amazement, fear, dismay and shame are uttered.
And then typically the one being called tries some type of feeble
and in the end futile attempt to get out of it!
Actually there are many times when their excuses appear perfectly valid.
Most express not being worthy of such a call,
others feel they lack a necessary ability to complete the task.
Abraham's wife was far past the age to have babies.
Moses claimed to either be too shy
or that perhaps he had a possible speech impediment?
Isaiah felt his "unclean" or sinful nature surely counted him out!
And Peter too shares this sense of himself when he said to Jesus,
"Have nothing to do with me, Master, as sinful as I am!"

I guess, you could say, God's call all boils down to perception?
In the end it is not what or how we perceive things
but how God views things that should determine reality.
Jesus we know challenged everyone he encountered,
challenging folks to look at things differently, to be open,

open to a new and a richer view of reality.
Evidently, God in each of those situations, either saw through
or saw beyond each individual's excuses and limitations.
Our job then as faithful followers is to find ways
to more and more closely hew our own perceptions
of ourselves and others to that which God sees.

Jesus of course is not only calling Peter, James and John,
but he is calling each and everyone of us, to follow him.
This call, my call and your call will also necessitate,
just like Peter, to push ourselves out from the shore.
And just like the calls of Peter, James and John
we too are called to leave behind on the shore
all that which is familiar, comfortable and safe.
Similarly, Jesus is also not content to merely keep us near to shore,
or a safe enough distance so that we can easily swim back
when things in our boat start to get a bit rocky.
Jesus is also asking us to, "Put out into deeper waters..."
And then what? Well the specifics may not always be clear,
but Jesus told Peter to, "let down your nets for a catch."
Peter was skeptical and no doubt tired from fishing all night.
He was probably also discouraged since his exhaustive efforts
have produced nothing- nothing to sell and nothing to eat.
But reluctantly he drops his nets one more time
likely thinking to himself that he is certain to find similar results.
And maybe also grumbling to himself,
"Why am I taking fishing advice from a carpenter?"
But how often has your certainty or your realistic expectations
come up empty or been found to be wanting?
Peter's perspective no doubt changes as he tries to pull in his nets.
For what awaited him was beyond his expectation,
So much fish in fact that their little fishing boats begin to sink!
For Peter, James and John, sailing into deep water
with an empty boat wasn't all that difficult.
But now, swamped with too many fish, it will take
every ounce of their energy and sailing prowess
just to make it back to shore.
Now fishing from the shore would certainly have been
much safer but that ain't where the big fish are!
And real serious fisherfolk want to be
where the biggest fish can be caught.
And Jesus wants that for you and me as well.
He wants to help us catch on to something so large

something that will so compel us that we will be willing
to risk everything and to go out even further, far beyond
what is merely safe, certain and especially what is expected!

Out into the deep and sometimes troubling waters
is where we are being pushed when we answer God's call.
And to push out from shore and to sail into deep water
may require effort and struggle at times?
Such a journey can also be dangerous business
especially if the weather takes a mean turn.
But once back, safely on the shore,
we realize then the deeper truth, the truth that
the most precious gifts usually only come after great efforts.

Peter's response to Jesus' invitation is also kind of sad.
Peter, in effect, is saying "get away from me,
leave me alone for I am a worthless human being!"
"Don't waste your time on me cause I'll surely let you down."
He was afraid, likely too scared to risk even the little bit
that he did have in order to venture out even further.

But I think that we all react this way a lot of times.
We know that only with great risk can we see great rewards.
We also know that healing can only really occur
once we apply those tested treatments that we also know
will cause pain and discomfort.

But the fear of failure and the experience of pain
become too great and so we decide to bail out.
Instead of going deeper we settle to fish from the dock
where its familiar and safe but where the fish are small,
so small we end up just throwing them back.

But most of the time, I'm convinced, that the places
where the Divine is calling us to
are anything but safe and comfortable!

But also once we encounter the Divine we may find it difficult to go back.
What lies ahead may be uncertain but we should never
let our fears and insecurities hold us back.

I'm a four on the Eneagram scale - an artist or poet.
So, certain songs, movies and even tacky inspirational posters,
can cause me to get all teary-eyed sometimes.
I saw one such poster hanging on a friend's wall a few years ago.
It is a picture of several majestic sailing ships
placidly moored at their docks in a still harbor.

The words underneath went something like this,

“Ships are safest when in the Harbor,
but that is not what ships were built for!”

I mean how sappy is that!

But it also sums up pretty well what I think
my purpose is here on this old rock we call earth.

I just don't think God created me, or you for that matter,
to sit safely on the shore or in the safety of the harbor

God breathed into us the breath of life in order
so that we would become truly and fully alive.

And to become truly and fully alive we must constantly
venture out into some deep, dark and fearful places.

Staying put or playing it safe, in my own personal experience
has seldom worked and is really quite delusional.

Playing it safe or trying to avoid risks, in the end,
seldom keeps us from experiencing pain or suffering.

Risk and growth- now that's what it's all about!

And I will not allow the size of my boat
to determine the amount of riches it can carry.

So, lets “put out a little way from the shore,”
and leave the old familiar stuff that often slows us down.

Let us also “put out into deep water,” because miracles
seldom happen in the safe shallows.

So, “go deep” let down your nets and see what you catch,
I'm sure of one thing, you WILL be surprised!