



First United Church of Oak Park

Calling the First Disciples

Luke 5:1-11

Alicia Reese

February 10, 2019

Luke 5:1-11

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of [Ja-nes-ah-wret] 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.

Water is such an important substance, and probably my favorite element. I was a swimmer starting when I was 5, a water polo player throughout high school and some of college, and I have been a certified scuba diver since I was 14. I have spent a lot of my life in water; I love it. I love the smell of chlorine and the ocean and the way it feels to move around in water.

One of my favorite things to imagine as a child was that I was a mermaid. I wished I could breathe under water so I would never have to leave the pool. I even had the nickname "Lish the Fish" for several years.

Our bodies are 60% water, our earth is over 70% water. We are full of and surrounded by water. But water is a mysterious thing and our understanding of it is all a matter of perspective. If you do not know how to swim, water can be a terrifying thing. If you live in a place where hurricanes threaten your home and community, water can be treacherous. If you are on a boat on a windy day and the water is choppy, you might get seasick; but to a scuba diver below that same boat, everything sways rhythmically and you are immersed in silence with a front row view of a whole new world.

But, it is only once you jump off the rocking boat, into the deep water that you can see beyond the chaos at the surface; and inversely, if a water's surface is still and glassy there may be things churning deep below or in the distance that you wouldn't be aware of if you don't know what to look for or if you aren't willing to test the water. Things aren't always what they seem when it comes to water.

Our scripture today takes place on the Lake of Gennesaret, which is the same body of water as the Sea of Galilee. We are reading from the gospel of Luke and hearing the story of how Jesus found his first followers. This version of calling the first disciples is a little less jarring than the account in the gospel of Mark, which happens in the very first chapter: Jesus just shows up and says "come, follow me!" and right away they follow him.

This seems far-fetched to me, personally. I mean, who literally drops everything, walks away from their life and everything they have ever known to follow someone they have just met? It's something that I can't imagine, can you? For who or what cause would you be willing to give up your entire life? Especially without thought or preparation.

But in Luke, we are given a little more context. We have heard the story of Jesus's birth, we are given a few stories of his growing up, he has been baptized by John, he has begun his ministry of preaching and teaching, and even performed a few miracles of healing, so more than likely these fishermen we meet in Luke have heard of this man, Jesus of Nazareth. They already have reason to find him impressive and perhaps were already on board with his message and mission. But they also do not blindly follow him; they are skeptical of him and what he asks. However, they do put their nets down into the water when he says to.

It's in the fourth verse that Jesus says to them, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." The Greek word used here is *bathos*. This word for deep water has been used several times in the bible and has connections to the primordial sea, which is a powerful Jewish symbol of chaos. Essentially, Jesus is asking these fishermen to trust him with their nets as a metaphor for their lives, telling them to plunge into the watery chaos with their nets and into the chaos of a life in ministry as one of his disciples, and they do! They are rewarded with a catch so big it almost sinks their boats and maybe they see this as foretelling of the rewards they will receive for following this man. And so, through this story, we see Jesus perform a miracle other than healing, a miracle of turning scarcity into abundance, of turning skeptics into believers.

This is a turning point in Jesus's ministry, where it goes from being a one man show to a band of disciples. But his recruiting process is lacking if you ask me. If I am putting a team together, to play softball for example, I want to make sure I have someone who can pitch really well; I want to have a few good infielders, a few outfielders, and several hitters. I may hold tryouts to see what each player is capable of, and then I will create my roster and subsequent batting order based on the talents of each of my teammates. But ultimately, I want to put together a team that has varied strengths that will work well together.

It doesn't appear that Jesus puts much thought into his team. It seems like he was out for a walk and stumbled across some guys at work and thought, maybe I should bring these guys with me. These men we meet in Luke: Simon, who would later be known as Peter, James and John – these are not extraordinary guys. They are middle-class working folks, like many of us here today.

Jesus called people like you and me to be his first followers. I believe he did this because he could see in each of them their varied strengths and gifts that they would bring to his ministry.

This story takes place during the height of the Roman empire, during a time of dissension, of political turmoil, oppression and chaos. Jesus knew that in his ministry, his target audience would be those who were marginalized by the systemic injustice of their time and he would need to surround himself with people who understood and could stand in solidarity with those who were struggling; everyday people, with varied strengths and gifts, who were willing to learn, and who could work together to carry out Jesus's message.

We are living in a time where I often look around and ask, "is this real life?" Particularly with it being Black History month, I find myself thinking about some of the leaders of the civil rights movement: Dorothy Height, Roy Wilkins, Gloria Richardson, Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King Jr., and what would they think of where we are today. Is history doomed to repeat itself forever?

This week, I wrote the evotional about our topic at the women's retreat last weekend, "The Beloved Community," which was Dr. King's global vision of a world that, "does not tolerate poverty, hunger and homelessness because international standards of human decency will not allow it, where racism and all forms of discrimination will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful-conflict resolution, love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred [because] injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Jesus's life and ministry were about creating The Beloved Community. That is not something a one-man show can do. It required a band of disciples, a whole community, and not just one community, but many communities across the world, made up of generations and generations of disciples – of people like you and me, who see the injustices everywhere and are dissatisfied, who are filled with righteous anger, who know God's love and have love for all people for "it is love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of humankind."

So. You are called. Even if you have already made the decision to follow Jesus, you may be skeptical at times or feel overwhelmed. But even in the midst of the chaotic choppy waters you are called; and probably then most of all, you are called. And when the surface of the water looks glassy, and serene, know that what lies beneath may be churning, raging water – the waters of racism, injustice, poverty, violence. These waters cannot be kept at bay; they demand to be felt, to rock the boat. Out of these waters of chaos and conflict comes the opportunity for resolution, reconciliation and abundance. The opportunity for The Beloved Community, that is why we must engage. That is why we break the glassy surface with our nets, why we dive in, because you and I, we are disciples.