**Fifth Sunday after Epiphany**

**Sunday February 6, 2022**

**“Putting out into the deep water” (Luke 5:1-11)**

This morning’s Scripture lesson is a wonderful passage that depicts the dramatic calling of Jesus’ first disciples, those who would eventually form the core of his growing band of followers. This vivid story about the calling of the first disciples and its setting on a fishing boat on the sea of Galilee might seem quite distant from our everyday lives, but if we take a closer look at this passage, we might discover an important message for our lives and our church. Who knows, maybe Jesus is challenging us to put our boats out into the deeper waters?

The passage begins with a scene that is very familiar to us; Jesus is teaching a large crowd on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. His popularity had increased significantly and so had the number of people who came to hear him. Jostled by large crowd, he looked for a way to continue to teach without being pushed into the lake (5:1). He spotted two fishing boats nearby and he climbed into one of them, which happened to belong to Simon Peter (5:2-3). Peter and his co-workers had just finished a night of fishing and they were washing their nets. Fishing nets were made of flax or linen, and they required regular care. After each night’s work, it was essential to clean the dirt and debris from them and to mend any holes that may have formed. A functioning net was the lifeblood of a fisherman’s vocation. After a long night’s work, I wonder if Peter felt a bit inconvenienced when Jesus climbed into his boat and asked him to put out a little way from the shore? (5:3). Have you ever felt inconvenienced by Jesus’ appeals to you? Have you ever felt like Jesus was asking a bit too much of you?

Even though Peter’s workday was all but finished, he granted Jesus’ request and took the boat out a little way from the shore. Jesus then proceded to teach the crowd, using the boat as his pulpit. When Jesus had finished his teaching time, he made another unexpected appeal to Peter, “*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch*” (5:4). Tired from his long workday and discouraged by the poor results, Peter responded to Jesus, voicing his reluctance to follow through on this, “*Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing*” (5:5). Nevertheless, he finally agreed to take one more attempt at fishing, saying to Jesus, “*Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets*” (5:5). Although Peter likely thought that this fishing expedition would be fruitless, he still placed his trust in Jesus’ words and went out into the deeper waters and lowered his nets.

This passage offers us a vivid object lesson on faith. While we can accomplish many things through our own ideas, passions, skills, and abilities, oftentimes even our best efforts fall terribly short. We’re a bit like Simon Peter and his co-workers, proficient fishermen who likely knew the best places to fish and were skilled in the use of nets, yet on that night, their best efforts yielded nothing. Along comes Jesus, who suggests that we trust him and give it another go. Just when the situation appears to be impossible and when any further action seems futile, Jesus asks us to trust, obey, and launch out into the deeper waters. But we must come to a place where we trust Jesus completely. All too often we put our trust in our own abilities and try to meet the challenges in our own strength. But like those fishermen, we’ll come up empty, call it a day, and start to pack up our nets. Too often, we respond to Jesus’ requests with a sense of doubt and defeat. We give up, saying, “*We’ve tried that before, Lord, and it didn’t work.”* So, when the voice of Jesus calls us to *put out into the deep water,* how will we respond? Will we trust and obey, or will we doubt and refuse?

When Peter stepped out in faith and listened to Jesus, the results were miraculous. The resulting catch of fish was so great that “*their nets were beginning to break*,” (5:6). The number of fish was so enormous that their two boats were filled, almost to the point of sinking (5:7). In that moment Peter experienced an epiphany, a profound moment when he knew that God had shown up. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation, he responded like any human being would when confronted with the sheer holiness of God. “*Master, leave,”* he said, “*I’m a sinner and can’t handle this holiness. Leave me to myself*” (5:8, *The Message*). When the prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of the glory of God, he responded in much the same way as Peter did. “*Woe is me! I am lost,*” he said, “*For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*” (Isaiah 6:5). Both Peter and Isaiah experienced a holy awe in the presence of the revelation of the Holy One. Yet these moments are never meant to incapacitate people with fear, rather, they are intended by God to be transformative. When we recognize the vast difference between God and us, we will have a greater sense of our limitations and God’s immense power, which will move us to be more willing to *let go and let God.*

Those whom God calls are deeply aware of their unworthiness to serve him. Yet God does not leave people wallowing in this deep despair. Instead, he picks them up, cleans them up, and sets them on a path of service. He brings his transforming power into their lives. In the aftermath of Isaiah’s epiphany experience, God’s heavenly angels took a burning coal from the altar and touched Isaiah’s lips with a cleansing fire (Isaiah 6:6-7), thus, preparing him for his vocation as God’s messenger (Isaiah 6:8). In a similar fashion, Jesus reassured Peter, saying, “*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people”* (5:10). For Peter and his friends, Jesus’ commission involved a radical change of life. Instead of catching dead fish and selling them at the marketplace, they would be gathering up living people and leading them to freedom in Jesus. We are called to engage in a similar mission, which causes us to have a certain degree of fear and trepidation. Most of us are at a loss on how to share our faith with others in ways that are caring and respectful. Nobody appreciates an in-your-face approach to evangelism. By following the example of Jesus, we will find our way to speak to others. Time and time again, when Jesus was in conversation with people about deeply spiritual matters, he listened and responded with compassion and love. Jesus is our foremost example as we engage in spiritually significant conversations with others.

At the conclusion of the passage, Peter and his co-workers brought their boats ashore and they *left everything* - boats, nets, and fish – and *followed Jesus* (5:11). The things that defined them, their boats and their nets, were left behind. The regular schedule of their daily lives, which centred on their vocation as fishermen, was given up. The fishing nets that they skillfully manoeuvred to catch fish were relinquished. Jesus asked them to give up the things that enabled them to define, regulate, and control their lives in order to embrace a new life beyond themselves. God broke into their world in a dramatic way and these fishermen responded faithfully. *How are we going to respond when Jesus bids us to leave our comfortable harbor, launch into the deeper waters, and lower our nets?*