

“Returning to the Deep”
Sermon delivered 2/7/2010
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Luke 5:1–11

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

If we imagined for a minute that our lives were like boats, how would you describe and define your boat? Would you be a sailboat with the wind blowing in different directions? Would you see your life as a dinghy, floating, but not going out to sea, a tugboat, towing others and helping them avoid trouble, or a motorboat, with great speed rushing around and making a wake? Maybe you are a cruise ship, or a battleship...or maybe your life today is like the Titanic, and you are rearranging the deck chairs? My next question is, what kind of boat would you *like* your life to be like? The metaphor of boats can be indicative of how we see our lives this morning, and what is the desire of our hearts?

Peter, James, and John's lives were literally describes as a fishing boat in our story this morning. They had been working all night, fishing in the "Lake of Gennesaret". Luke prefers this name over the "Sea of Galilee," using the Hebrew name for the Lake. At this time, fisherman had to fish at night , so that they could get the catch to the market in the morning, for the sake of freshness. Remember, they had no refrigeration then! The nets are being cleaned because they are made from linen. Jesus is standing on the shoreline as the crowd is pressing to hear him.

There are two boats, these boats would have been about 27 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. Jesus gets into the boat belonging to Peter. Luke doesn't report a word of what he says to the crowd. So, this morning the Good News comes to us by what he does, as opposed to what he says. "Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets." Put out into the "deep water" can, for

many of us, only mean one thing - a place we may not want to go. Like Peter, we are tempted to respond with some objections. Many of us may not be pleased with the result of our lives and the lives we are living, but they are safe and predictable, even if they feel shallow and superficial. "This is as good as it gets." So, we resign ourselves to what we perceive to be reality.

Peter's reality was recognizing Jesus as "Master", but also questioning. What do you know about fishing, teaching, law medicine, raising kids, getting out of debt, what do you know? You are asking me to put my dingy out into the deep waters? Like Peter, we are tired, wondering if it will be worth it. Our experience tells us it won't work, if anything, it is asking for more trouble that we need today. "Yet, if you say so Lord, I will..."

How many of you can identify with Peter this morning? He is a day late and a dollar short that morning, after fishing all night. He just wanted to go home, get something to eat, and get some rest. Like many of us. All of you have taken many and different kinds of risk in your lives. We all risk life every day without knowing what the outcome will be. Some of you have been told, and believe, that if you just had enough faith, you would reap the benefits. You have dropped your nets, come up empty handed, and now may be in a place where you don't want to "rock the boat." The older we get, it seems the more conservative we become in ascertaining risk.

We are afraid, insecure, and imagine the worst. This isn't a story for people who play with their plastic sailboats on the shoreline of life and build sandcastles. This story is about and for people who have been out in the dark all night and come in empty handed with dreams crushed, hope gone, and despair a part of life. You might be cruising along this morning with the wind at your back. This story is for you and a time in your life when you are faced with tough decisions. The temptation is always to say, what is the use? We know the big fish are in the deep waters. The expert in us, like Peter, want to say to Jesus, "you may know a thing or two about being a carpenter, but you don't know a thing about, raising kids, facing cancer, or living in *my* dog eat dog world...and you want me to do *what* again?"

What would that "again" be in your life? What doors have you shut and decided that is nothing behind them? As a Pastor, I concluded long ago that God is present in people's lives long before they get to church. My questions is always what is the Lord doing, where is the Lord guiding? What kind of resistance, rebellion, and rejection is one demonstrating? Where are the places you are fearful to go again? Who needs your forgiveness, what baggage are you carrying? If your nets are empty this morning, what waters do you need to return to?

Yes, the critic in your head will say, "Collins might have sounded good this morning...but there is no need to go back. What is done is done. You have

prayed, been a good person, honest, loving, and look what it has gotten you!" Or maybe you will convince yourself that you have gotten burnt often enough....and maybe you have...but I don't think the Lord will lead you back into abusive relationships, workplaces, or situations just to have you come back empty handed again.

This is normal! Stanley Hauerwas contends that our culture is built on the foundation of the fear of death. He says our health care, economy, government, Gold's Gym, everything is built up around our fear of dying. Ernest Becker, in his book, *The Denial of Death*, confirms this attitude. We are shaped more by the Good Friday's of our lives than we are by our Easter Mornings. There is a greater fear, and that is the fear of being raised to new life. We see this fear of new life exhibited in Simon Peter this morning. He dropped his nets into the deep waters, lo and behold, what happened? New life is frightening. So frightening, some of us will sabotage ourselves and others for the familiarity of the known and the predictable.

What did Simon Peter do when the nets started to fill and the boats to the point of sinking? He wasn't singing the doxology "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." NO! "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Being raised to a new life is a fearful thing! Most of us are probably more comfortable with the explanation of God than the experience of God in our lives. This is normal. Moses resisted when God said, "I have seen the affliction of my people...go down Moses." Isaiah said he was on of unclean lips. Now Peter says he is sinful. What kind of a creative response would you use? What would be your line of reasoning?

Each of us have skeletons in our closet that we believe are true about us, and that keep us from the belief that we are incapable of living out the spiritual gifts God intended to give the world through us. For whatever reason, we may believe that we are not forgiven for what we have done. It is easier for Peter and for us to resign ourselves to the way things are, as opposed to being prepared for the new thing God wants to do in our lives. Overcoming doubts, guilt, experience, and knowledge can be a barrier for us dropping our net into the deep waters. What have you got to lose?

When Simon Peter said to Jesus, "I am a sinful man," what was Jesus' response? Jesus said to him, and to us, "Don't continue to be afraid." Peter wasn't fearful of God *not* acting in his life, but afraid of him acting. As Jonathan Edwards titled one of his sermons, "It is a frightening thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We have to let go of our predictions and be open to wonder and surprise.

Jesus said to Peter, "from now on, you will be catching people." I don't like how this verse has been used down through the centuries as a tool of manipulation to sell the Good News of Jesus Christ. Nobody wants to be a fish that gets hooked,

netted, or fried for dinner. One of the translations I prefer goes, "You will be restoring people to life and strength." (Stroffogen). Svernungsen contends that this calling is not to hook people and drag them in (which we would never do), it is rather to cast the net of God's love around you.

A reality of life is that we are going to die. It is not the last word for Christians, but it is a harsh reality of separation, faith, and loss as we stretch to Easter morning and the Good News of victory over death. They say it is almost impossible for us to envision ourselves dying. I would like to challenge this notion for a moment by all of us envisioning our dying, looking over our lives and the things we wish we would have done. Someone said while dying, we will regret the things we didn't do, as opposed to the things we did do. As you are looking back over your life, what are the deep waters you wonder if you should have returned to by the grace of God, and dropped your nets? Would you do it? Will you be open in the face of resistance and common sense? If you are still breathing, God is not done with you yet.