

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

5 Once while Jesus^[a] 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.

A Vision of God in the Temple

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴The pivots^[a] on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, 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!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph^[b] touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" ⁹And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.'

¹⁰Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."

¹¹Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:

"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
¹²until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

¹³Even if a tenth part remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled."^[c]

The holy seed is its stump.

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Luke 5:1-11

“Life’s Wild Restless Sea”

Kerra Becker English

If you ever doubted someone saying they were “chosen specifically by God” to do something... Remember that in scripture, whenever someone is directly called by God, it is always followed by the person wondering if they could possibly be “good enough.” In today’s readings, Isaiah has a vision of God in the Temple, and responds by saying, “Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips.” Simon Peter is astonished by the great catch of fish and says, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” I know that when I was exploring my early call to ministry – I talked to every minister I knew and asked them how they knew that they were worthy of becoming clergy, because I felt like God might be making a colossal mistake with me. Most of them laughed, big laughs, when I asked. Now I see that was a good sign in those ministers in whom I confided. None of them could make the case for why they deserved to be clergy either! At some point answering the call becomes more important than justifying how fit you are for the role.

Calvin at least got this part of his theology right. There’s nothing that any of us can really do to merit God’s favor or Jesus’ attention. It’s a gift pure and simple. There’s nothing about what we believe, or nothing about who we are, or nothing about what we’ve done that makes us good enough to be blessed on account of our own awesomeness. And, thanks be to God, the flip side is true as well, there’s nothing we’ve done to make us bad enough to put us outside the love of God in Christ. And just in case you were thinking that sounds like some sort of liberal “anything goes” theology that goes easy on our sin – remember that the apostle Paul said as much. In the book of

Romans, no less, he proclaims, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Get it. Nothing. You have unclean lips from cursing like a sailor, or at the very least swearing like a Chesterfield county parent on a snow day - OK. You happen to be the follower of Jesus who denies him at every turn. Good for you Peter, you get to be the rock on which I will build my church. You persecuted and maybe even murdered a few early Christians – OK Paul maybe a little change will do you good and Gentiles will listen to your powerful arguments. I don’t know about how you think – but God’s choices seem a little out there sometimes.

Determining why God chooses who God chooses is a mystery, a mystery we aren’t going to solve anytime soon. The stories we have of what happens next though – that’s where our learning can begin. Saying “yes” to God is an act of love. Yes, we’ll throw out the nets. Yes, we will follow Jesus wherever he’s going. Here I am, I’m listening, send me God.

We probably have a thousand reasons to say no. We heard last week and this week, that excuses are very prominent in call stories. It’s almost the one consistent thing that make a call story a call story. But regardless of the stalling that happens at first, we learn so much from the people who bypass those excuses, give in, and say “yes.” What the “yes” to God allows is for us to see ourselves, even for just a moment as God sees us. It is a yes to God’s plan, and God’s plan for us is good, good to overflowing it turns out. Jesus sees the catch of fish that had eluded the trained fishermen all night long. Go out into the deep, Jesus says. Trust me, Jesus says, and find out what will happen.

The call to love in this case, is a call to love yourself enough to see what Jesus sees in you. The disciples were a rogue bunch of dudes – fishermen, a tax collector, Judas. And if you begin to count those who usually aren’t specifically numbered among Jesus’ followers, the crowds included

drunks, prostitutes, the poor, the blind, the lame, women, foreigners, and people who were in just about in every way the ones who don't seem to count enough to be counted, ever. These people, our people follow Jesus out of their own sense of longing to be whole. We're not talking just vocational calling here, we're talking about the call to live life fully that was what Jesus came to offer to each and every one of us.

The call to follow is the call to the Christian. Jesus calls us, all of us, over the tumult of life's wild restless sea. I forgot about that wonderful hymn line until Austin suggested that we sing it this week. Just managing our own lives can be wild and restless, where wave after wave pounds against us. And Jesus expects us to follow him through that mess. To follow is also to be called to love. The followers of Jesus are expected to be where he is, with the crowds of people he hangs out with, studying the same texts he read, paying attention to the same God he called Daddy.

And when we say yes to that call, Jesus tells us, "Don't be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people." As with all metaphors, this text is widely open to interpretation. Jesus tells fishermen who know about catching FISH, that now they are going to be catching people. They won't be using nets – so what will they be using to draw people into making the same life choices they made to follow this wandering teacher? Often times we, in today's Christian church, see this as an evangelism text, or some sort of church growth model. How is our marketing going to work? Is the message getting out? How are our numbers doing? Are we catching enough people? And some of our Christian cohort would be asking, "Are they being saved?"

None of these things seem to be present in the text. They are the assumptions we come to the text with in a time when church attendance is waning, and we worry at least to some extent about how we are going to keep our beloved institutions going. But this story has absolutely nothing to do with institutions. It has everything to do with people, people who weren't being seen or

acknowledged would now be seen and acknowledged. In the story, Simon, James, and John had been fishing all night and catching nothing. Jesus asks them to go out into the deep, and they bring back their nets full. Maybe this story is suggesting something else to us. Go where the people are hiding in the night, and bring them into the light of day. Let them know that God loves them by letting them know that we love them. Jesus did that throughout his entire ministry. Part of the scandal of his love, a love he said came directly from God, was that he extended it to people that were not meant to feel that love.

Maybe that's an even more relevant message for the church today. Not that we shouldn't be grateful for those who come alongside of us and join the church, and become members, and seek to know God's love, but that we see our role as the church as connecting to those who have little, or feel like they have nothing left to give. It's where love and service start to come together. Jesus calls us to follow him, to catch the attention of others by recognizing that we all are God's beloved children. It's a wild ride on the restless sea to begin to do THAT. We don't know what we will catch.

Again, in a time when church attendance is an option, and the temptation is there in many congregations to revert back to fear and scare people into the pews with hell, and the temptation is there to draw people in with entertainment, play music they like and they will come, Jesus calls us to simply to carry his message of love within us. From now on you WILL catch people, or as I remember this story told from Sunday School class in my early years – Jesus says, “I will make you fishers of people.” It's not our job, per se, to fill the church. It is our job to hook others on God's love. The message is the “catch.” Though Jesus uses that huge catch of fish to make a point, it isn't a numbers game to be won, it's an adventure where we go to the places where people will be found, found and loved again.

Jesus has already called you to follow. That's how we know we are already on the hook. In some way, at some time in your life, those two words, "Follow me" stuck. Following Jesus may mean learning from his teaching, or living in his love, or telling his story, or bringing healing into the world, or being angry at the invisibility of his people, or whatever it is that is your part in the following. Too often, we have described calling as a call to leadership when the real calling, the hopeful calling, the make a difference in the world calling is a call to follow – to allow the path to open before you as Jesus takes you through life's wild restless sea.

Renowned poet, Mary Oliver, died this past January, and as news of her death began circulating so did quotes from her poems. The closing line from her poem *The Summer Day* is one that catches your attention and sometimes even takes your breath away, and it has much to say about this call to follow on a wilder, more restless path, so I will close with her question – one I hope you will also ponder:

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

Amen.

Prayer requests – Caitlin’s Mom, her friend Emily

Called to Love

Today we are going to talk about “Staying Connected”

Newsletter, Facebook page, website

SUSAN in the office – called to love as a missionary, she’s our missionary

Contact from former members

I am a former member of Ashland Presbyterian Church. From the first day I stepped into the sanctuary, I felt I had found a church to love and be loved. During the years I was a member, I felt more love from the members of this church than I had ever felt before in any of the other churches I had gone to. When I moved back to the Shenandoah Valley, and my home area, I so wanted to find another church like yours. It took me three years to settle on a church that could be like you all were. I am a member of Hebron Presbyterian and I am so thankful that I had you folks to show me what a loving, caring, sharing church could be, so I knew what I was looking for. You will always be in my heart with wonderful memories. Thanks for loving me.

My husband passed away, and I have remarried, and my husband is also a member of Hebron and we both sing in their choir. I can't say how much I enjoyed singing in your choir with Karla and all.

Shirley Russell Fallin

Grace Arey

Contact from new potential friends...