

Scriptures:

Isaiah 6:1-8

Luke 5:1-11

Risking the Deep Waters

Our scripture readings this morning began with seraphim's and angel appearances once again. And as is always the case the one called by the spirit rejects his worthiness and call. Isaiah is in a dark place. He has little faith in humanity and he sees the world in despair. He has no ability to see that he might be a part of changing that. If he were living today, he might say, "We are watching TV while the world is being laid waste. Everything is smoke and mirrors." And yet once the seraph touches his lips and tells him he is cleansed he hears the call of God and he says "Here am I, send me!" I am always amazed throughout scripture by how an encounter with the holy can place within a person's belly a courage beyond compare. I am amazed and yet there have been moments in my life where I have encountered the spirit in such a way that I knew I was not alone and God was before me. It was the same for the disciples in our text today. When Jesus first came to him they kind of scoffed and questioned his wisdom but after the encounter their lives were changed. Isaiah's "I am a man of unclean lips" is echoed by Peter's "I am a sinful man." What needs to happen before we are able to receive God's call? Considering God's call and our own doubts, we are led to ask, "Who am I, really?" Jesus reminds us not to be afraid. When we follow Jesus, our nets burst with wisdom and spirit (and fish!).

Most of you will know by now that I grew up boating and I still love to be out on the water any time I possibly can. I wish I could figure out a way to afford Dad's sailboat but it is just not in the financial plan. Now I am a boater but admittedly I don't know a lot about fishing. We fished some as kids but my Dad simply didn't have the patience for it. Which would sound strange to any boater that would choose a power boat over a sail boat. Dad is a sailer through and through. Catching the wind, riding the waves, feeling the rush and the power of nature propel you through the water is his life blood. He loves it so much he would sit out in the sound for days just waiting for the right wind to come up and carry him to his next destination if time permitted. But sit and wait with a line in the water for a fish to bite - that's just too discouraging when it doesn't happen. He doesn't get why people would spend days for without a catch. Crabbing we always did because you could leave your trap and come back to it and it took little effort and time but fish - not his thing. Thus not mine either.

As I read this story this week it reminded me of an amazing experience Macky and I had last summer with an uncle of mine who lives just outside of Seaside Oregon. It has become one of Macky's new favourite places to visit and it has forever been one of mine. Last summer after we finished the best dragon boat race of the season in Portland Oregon we headed over to the coast to spend a day with family in Seaside. My Uncle was texting us asking if we wanted to go crabbing. Macky and I will never pass up the opportunity for a crab feast and so we said sure. We had no idea what we were in for. My uncle pulled out the kayaks and the crab traps and we went

to the estuary. We got all geared up each with our own kayak and crab traps and we headed out to catch a couple crabs for dinner. Well little did we know we would be pulling in boat loads of crabs throwing away ones that normally you would keep but there were bigger ones. I had spent all my life crabbing pulling up a trap left for hours hoping to get one maybe even two but within an hour we had more than enough to feed all 10 of us. It was exhilarating, kind of miraculous it is surprising we even came home we fell so in love with that place in that moment. Imagine how much more invigorating this moment was for Simon and his crew.

They had spent a night fishing with no success and then a carpenter comes and tells them how to do it properly.

Basically Jesus commandeers a boat, preaches a sermon, and tells the fishermen where the fish are. After hundreds of pounds of fish are finally caught, Simon is so taken aback that he immediately gives up his job as a fisherman and follows Jesus accepting that now his task is to fish for people. Honestly you would think that kind of success would give you energy to keep up your work but on the other hand if someone came along that was that powerful I just might give everything up and follow them also. So what is the point of the story for those of us who don't fish (or even those of us who do and are unlikely to have Jesus show up and fill our boats with Salmon?).

Right away likely because I have two young girls and one of them looked a lot like baby Moana I thought of this story. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6qCPu1qn98>

This is one of the favourite movies in our home "Moana presents the struggles of finding and living one's True Self. Moana is a young girl in line to be chief of her island home, Motunui. It is an island that provides all they need. The bay provides fish, the island's resources provide food and materials to build and create, and the people fulfil their ordained roles. The gods are providing for them abundantly and their happiness is there on the island. And Moana will help continue this pattern as the eventual new chief. This beauty and order in the opening scenes paints perfection. It might even be a reminder to us that God always provides abundantly. But for the Motunui people, the island has become a kind of false security, an attachment. They find no need to go beyond the reef that surrounds their home. "The island gives us what we need / And no one leaves," they sing. They tell Moana what's important is *where you are*....

The divine powers show Moana that her kin were once voyagers, seeking new lands. But this vocation was lost once the Motunui people attached themselves to the security of their island. Her voyager history teaches her who she is. At first her sailing skills are imperfect but after meeting Maui (demi-god of the wind and sea) he teaches her wayfinding. "It's seeing where you're going in your mind. Knowing where you are by knowing where you've been," he says... There is also a flashback montage to her ancestors singing, "We read the wind and the sky ... At night we name every star / We know where we are / We know who we are." Moana learns the value of discernment, reading the signs of her past to lead her to discover who she is. Throughout her own voyage the forces of nature guide her and push her in the right direction.

Through her willingness to risk and follow the divine call into the depths Moana and her people discover who they are. Even Te Fiti, the island deity, is not who she is when her heart is removed. The story shows that there are sometimes masks covering up our true selves. We too are voyagers, reading the signs, and discovering who God made us to be. Sometimes the call is deep or faint. Sometimes we need someone to help us listen. And sometimes our response to that

call comes into tension with our family, our home, and what we've come to consider safe and comfortable."¹

The Rt. Rev. Robert Wright suggests If there's anything to learn from our story in Luke, it's **"why some people don't catch fish."** Some people don't catch fish because they refuse to go into deep water. Jesus told Simon, "Let's leave the shallows and go to the deep." Everybody knows the schools of big fish are in the deeper water. And the first rule of fishing is you've got to go where the fish are. But we know that this story is less about fish and more about abundance, at least that's how I see it. We could substitute fish for abundance or wisdom or love, healing or peace. All those things we want in full. Some times we don't catch these things because we refuse to go deep, we refuse to go beyond the reef. We are willing to die a slow death living in the safety of what we know, even if we know it is not life-giving. Over and over scripture tells us "Do not be afraid." Jesus knows that often it is in the risk that life is found. Deep water is where the increase is. Deep water takes faith and trust. You have to believe there is more on the other side of the challenges of going to the depths. And yet, staying in the shallow water is often pleasant, its easier. It tickles our ankles when we walk in it. The minnows and the half-grown fish gather there. You can see all the way to the bottom in shallow water. That's why staying in the shallow water can be such a temptation. Shallow water doesn't cost much; it doesn't require much of us and it certainly doesn't take a whole lot of courage. "But Simon knew the minnows couldn't feed him. They couldn't fill him. The minnows weren't the desire of his heart. The deep water of faith is where those things we say we want are swimming around. The shallow is where we begin the adventure, not where we finish."²

"Deep water is where we have to go to get what God has for us. Some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to catch fish. When Jesus tells Simon, "Let's go to the deep water," he doesn't stop there. He says, "...prepare for a catch." What an encouragement.

This is a word for us who go to church regularly. Week after week we go to the deep water of worship, but do we go preparing for a catch? Do we go believing that a blessing is just waiting for us? Or do we go to appease a spouse or be seen by others or, worse, just out of habit?"³

God wants us to live in expectation. Expectation is the first-born child of faith, "the substance of things hoped for." No expectation, no real faith. When we say we believe in God, we are not saying I am agreeing with some abstract idea; we're saying we expect the things that God has promised to us.

We're saying that I'm a partner with the "giver of every good gift." And among those gifts God has promised us are fruitfulness and fish and forever.

I like how Jesus keeps pushing Simon's boundaries. "Leave the shore, Simon. Go into the deep, Simon." These are easy in comparison to "Expect a blessing, Simon." Jesus was calling Simon to risk being disappointed in God.

¹ <https://godinallthings.com/2017/01/02/who-you-are-moanas-call-to-discernment/>

² http://day1.org/1712-why_some_people_dont_catch_fish

³ http://day1.org/1712-why_some_people_dont_catch_fish

Some people don't catch fish because they don't go to the deep water, and some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to. But some people don't catch fish because they know more about fish than God. By that I mean some of us don't live abundantly because we are not willing to risk faith, we are not willing to trust, we are not willing to go to the depths. Simon almost makes this mistake. He tells Jesus in that exasperated tone, "Hey, we've been fishing all night. We know fish. The fish don't run in the day. Aren't you a carpenter moonlighting as a preacher anyway?"

Sometime we think we know more than God. Or at least we behave that way.

God says to us live in love, Forgive others. Bless those who curse you. Give abundantly. Visit the jails. Forget your life and you'll have a fuller one. Remember the Sabbath day, it's for worship and family not for catching up on work. The list goes on. We've heard these all before - love your enemies, do not worry, don't be afraid, live in hope, in love, in peace.

But we ignore God's invitation to abundance. We say to God by our actions: I know more about marriage, more about healing, more about forgiveness, more about children, more about money than you do.

Simon, for just a split second, almost forgot that God is God. Modern culture doesn't really have any use for the word humility; it goes back to the Enlightenment when Western culture told itself that it could know everything. It's that culture that has forced me to embrace mystery, to delve into the deep because I haven't experienced the all-knowing world as all that helpful when times have been tough.

Like Simon, the best decision we can make is recognizing we don't have it all figured out, and in humility he accepted assistance, in humility he let go of his pride and followed Jesus. Perhaps his present emptiness and frustration had made him ready to learn.

Wright argues the real miracle of this story is that Simon decided that God was God and that he would live that way beginning immediately.

Just look at what Simon says before the miracles begin to happen, "Yet, Lord if you say so...."

My frustration is real, Lord. My pain is real. My emptiness is real. My despair is real, all real, Lord, and yet. And, yet, you are God and I am not.

That's when our miracles will begin to happen, that's when we will start catching fish, or abundant life as the metaphor would have it. When we let go of being settled in our own miserable ways and risk the hard conversations, the difficult move, the relationship, the education, you name for yourself what has you stuck.

Simon's full net brings him freedom, life, joy, abundance. Are we willing to listen to God's call on our lives? Are we willing to say Okay - here I am, send me so that I and all those around me might experience more life.

Let's pray together.

Set us free, O God, from that which holds us back and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in Jesus, now and forever. Amen.