

Text: Luke 5: 1-11

Title: Surprising reactions

Date: February 7

I am betting for many of us, this has to be THE calling of the disciples story. We know this one by heart, and we should for it shows up in Sunday school lesson after Sunday school lesson. There was even a summer camp song about it. I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men fishers of men. I will make you fishers of men and those are the only words I know....” The scene is dramatic. Jesus is out there, teaching from Peter’s boat, and when he is done he performs a miracle in front of God and everyone. We imagine Peter, music building in the background, responding to Jesus call to follow him by boldly casting aside his nets and in the best superhero fashion, just as the music reaches its crescendo, opens his robes to reveal blue tights with a Christian Fish emblazoned on the chest, ready and eager to “boldly go where no one has gone before” to preach the Good News as the music fade back into the background. OK, maybe we can do without the blue tights- but still. We treat Peter and the other disciples as larger than life characters, somehow ontologically different than us, able and willing to do things we would never imagine ourselves to do. This is too bad, because in doing just that, we demonstrate that we have missed the point of the story.

Luke is a better storyteller than Mark. 16 verses into his gospel, Mark is walking along the lake, sees Simon and Andrew throwing a net into the lake and says, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” No lead up, no preamble, no nothing. Luke, on the other hand has given us 4 chapters to get to know who Jesus is. we know of his miraculous birth, heralded by angels. We have seen him tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus has preached in his home town, healed people and cast out demons. He has even met Peter- for one of the first things he did after his sermon was to heal Peter’s mother in Law. Which means Peter has been around Jesus for a while- he has seen what he can do.

On this particular day, Jesus is preaching to the crowd. Presumably they came to either be healed or see someone else get healed- for the word about this Jesus has gotten around. Luke tells us that they came to hear the word of God, already we know that he is teaching on his own authority. Being hemmed in, he looks for a way out- and starts asking for Simon Peter’s boat. Oddly enough, the enormous catch of fish seems almost anticlimactic. The same story shows up in John 21 as a post resurrection account with a lot more punch. Luke has already established that Simon Peter has seen Jesus do supernatural things, enough to make his reaction understandable.

So what would you say if someone just made you a small fortune- for that kind of haul had to equate to some serious cash. “Thank you,” or “What are you doing tomorrow around quitting time?” You and I might say that, but not Simon Peter. “Get out of here! Go Away! For I am a sinner!” This makes all the sense in the world to me. Simon hadn’t put it together that Jesus

was the Messiah yet- that's still a few chapters away- but it is obvious that Jesus was no run of the mill itinerant rabbi. He was prophet, at the very least. But if Jesus is a prophet, that must mean that he speaks for God. and If he speaks for God, using my boat it follows that sooner or later he is going to speak to me with the authority of God and I am going to have to deal with that. for if God calls, I cannot say no. the only person I can think that told God no was Jonah and look what happened to him!

In this, Simon Peter is certainly not alone. When God tells Moses that he is going to go back to Egypt, is going to face down Pharaoh and lead his people to freedom; his first reaction was, "Lord, send someone else!" Don't send me, stumbling, mumbling Moses- send my brother Aaron, that golden tongued devil. Simon Peter knew, just as Moses knew, that when God speaks all of our own priorities go right out the window! It is better than even odds that God is going to have me doing something that I am not equipped for, something that take me out of my comfort zone. Lord, isn't there anyone else you can send?

But even more than the fear that God will ask him to go and do something that he may not feel equipped to do, is the feeling that comes when we meet the holy. Have you ever been in that place where the image of yourself that you carry in your mind runs headlong into reality- and loses? Simon Peter most likely told himself that he was a pretty good guy. He had a good work ethic, he took care of his family and he really wasn;t all that bad about living up to the commandments. True, I don't always keep them all the time- but I am better at keeping them than my brother Andrew! Whatever image of himself as a good guy Simon had constructed for himself fell apart like a house of cards when compared to Jesus' holiness. Do me a favor Lord (Simon is already calling Jesus Lord!) and get away from me. So much for superhero Simon Peter!

That is why Jesus opens with "do not be afraid." Luke has already told us who Jesus is, we already know that Jesus knows just what kind of uncleanness is on Simon Peter's heart- and he accepts him anyway! Jesus already knows exactly who and what Simon is- and loves him anyway. Jesus is keenly aware of Simon's self limitation- and chooses to use him anyway!

You see, one of the reasons that we put Simon Peter and all the other Apostles up on that pedestal is that the pedestal takes them out of our day to day lives. We can choose to live within the confines of our own self limitations- and never make the connection that if Jesus could change the world with the 12 he chose with the limitations they had how much more could he do with our lives if we just gave them to him half as much as the disciples. Down deep we know that God is an all or nothing sort of God, half isn't going to be near good enough. So like Peter, we want to run away, imploring God to choose someone else to do anything else! Jesus' words to us are the same as his word's to Peter- Don't be afraid, I have a job for you to do..."

For God does have a job for us to do. It used to be good enough for us to come to church, punch the religious time clock and then go back our lives. (actually it was never OK) no longer can we content ourselves with consuming religious services, convincing ourselves that we are not really all that bad. Now we are faced with the reality of our lives as they are- and know that God loves us anyway and wants us to make deeper connections with each other and with the larger community so that we can experience ever more the blessings that God has in store when his people follow his voice. Like Peter, we want run away- and like Peter we are unable to say no to our Lord. God is going to use us, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

That is one of the things we celebrate in the Lord's Supper. Every one of the disciples around that table had a story just like Peter's. Every one of them experienced their own sins being forgiven through Jesus' holiness. Every one of them experienced being used by God, even though they knew they were not worthy. Every one of them had their preconceived notions of what they could and could not do blown right out the window when they followed Jesus' lead. We are no different, you and I. Like them, Jesus invites us to this table by name. Like them, our preconceived notions of what we are able to do are trumped by the Holy Spirit. And like those disciples, we too have experienced God's love and grace by having the weight of our sins lifted from our shoulders – sure beats feeling that we don't measure up. We may not be superheroes- but then neither was Peter- just a guy whose sin was forgiven and was used by the Lord. Now it is our turn- let us come to this table in worship and thanksgiving.

\*Communion Hymn #508 For the Bread Which You Have Broken