

Away from the Shore
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Luke 5:1-11
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Let us pray:

God of unbound righteousness, take us into the deep waters to experience your abundance and heal our self-doubt. Make us fishers of people. May the words form my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, oh my rock and my redeemer.

When I was about eight years old, we vacationed on Big Deer Lake outside of Grand Rapids, Minnesota. For a child this giant blue lake, well over a hundred feet deep, was like a sea. My parents had rented a power boat, and my two brothers and I went the 5 miles to the other side to buy candy bars at the bait shop. On our ride back I had my Charleston chew in hand as the inboard sailed across the endless sparkling waters until-

BAM! BOOM! SPLASH!

I was thrown to the floor, the boat came to a stop, and it was silent.

My head hurting, I stood up to see a submerged rock bar was beneath us, the boat was now crunching and scraping on the rocks as waves pushed us along. Boat pieces glistened on the lake floor. And water started to lap at my feet.

At that moment the expansive waters of Big Deer Lake seemed forbiddingly large and frightening. There was not another boat in sight: nobody to hear our calls for

help, our words just disappeared into the vastness never to be heard. We were helpless as wind slowly carried us towards distant shores.

My brother noticed I had not eaten my candy bar. Gus is tall, never without a joke, and unphased by most things people consider dangerous. And as older brothers do, he decided to torment me a little. He leaned over to me, cupped his hands around mine and said, "Don't open your candy bar; you'll probably want to save it, it might be days before we eat again."

My heart skipping a beat and clutching my candy bar so hard I crushed it!

Our scripture today also takes place on the water most likely outside of Capernaum. Along the shore are a series of small, rock-lined inlets that zigzag the coast of the Sea of Galilee. In fact, one inlet is called the Cove of the Sower, and it's a likely place where Jesus called his first disciple about 2,000 years ago. You can see this cove on the front of your bulletin. With rocky hills sweeping upwards, you can easily hear words spoken across the water of these inlets. It is a natural amphitheater.

To get away from the curious masses, Jesus retreats to a boat so facing his audience, and speaking to the crowds lining the lakeshore, pressing shoulder to shoulder against one another. Hoping to hear him speak his words of life.

I imagine Jesus eyes were twinkling and he was smiling in this moment, that deep wide kind of smile your elders have whose life is so full of joy it's as if all the hard times were washed away. I imagine his hand upon Simon's shoulder saying, "God ahead, put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch."

Perhaps what is most telling, and indicative of our own spiritual challenge today, is Simon Peter's response to the realization he is in the midst of the Living Word. When the nets are pulled burgeoning with tails and fins and life-giving sustenance, Simon Peter he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

One commentator asks:

What's holding Simon back? It's a lack of trust, a lack of faith — but not a lack of faith in Jesus, whom he calls both "Master" and "Lord." On the contrary, what Simon lacks in this story is faith in himself, in his own capacities and worth, and in the very idea that God would use an ordinary person, a mere fisherman (and not a particularly good one at that, out all night with nothing to show for it) to accomplish God's purposes.

When you are in the deep waters, have you doubted yourself? Second guessed your capacity.

When you are confronted with God's abundance joyously lavished upon you in delight, do you pull away?

Then you are much like Simon Peter.

This is the calling of the first disciple, and it is a watershed moment in the history of humanity. In an instant the vertical ascension of The Living Word- Jesus the Christ who had come down from heaven- become an eternal horizontal movement. The Living Word moved into the mortal heart of Simon, surged over the scales of the fish nearly splitting his nets, and
Then out, out, out and away from the boat,

The Living Word spread among the people, gracing their lips to spread it further and further. The Living Word departed came to us as eternal dew, echoing against rocky shores.

And when they came in from the deep; Simon Peter and the Zebedee Brothers James and John would band together and drop everything departing their daily lives. The spoken word of God in Christ had now been unleashed and would re-shape the history of humanity.

‘When Christ calls a person,’ declared Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘he tells them to come and die.’ But when Simon Peter first met Jesus, he didn’t realize this. If he could have seen a movie of what would happen to him in the next year or two, he might well have repeated his plea that Jesus leaves him in peace. But that’s not how Jesus worked; it’s not how God works. Peter clearly had a sense that life was never going to be the same again, that he was going to face new demands and challenges; but he couldn’t help being swept off his feet by what had happened.”
-N.T. Wright

Gods living word draws people in. Gods living words cuts through the din of pressing crowds and daily pressures. Gods living word pierces the hearts of common people to offer the radical freedom of forgiveness. God’s living word demands our attention and presents a decision.

Many of us are in Simon’s position in God’s Kingdom today. We have heard the scriptures of Jesus banding together of the disciples and enjoyed their comical and holy exploits Sunday to Sunday. Maybe some of us even know others whose lives seem so full of faith, and joy, and hope that we are a little bit jealous, a little bit envious, that that in the middle of all the hardships and pain and betrayal of human life- they remain hopeful. Still, some of us are probably just relieved that

the spotlight hasn't been turned on us, that we aren't in the boat with Jesus's hand on our shoulder.

But ultimately, there are no bystanders in the kingdom of God. The Living Word is now horizontal, it has been unleashed, it has covered the globe. The spotlight is on us. We cannot pretend to don't hear it: God's word echoes from millions of cathedral roofs and every coastline, it has spread across the deepest waters known, and despite our reluctance and failures, reaches us everywhere.

God will never go silent for God's people. God will never lose hope for God's people. Because when Jesus calls, he demands most everything, because he has already given everything himself, and has plans for us and the world, that we would never have dreamed of.

I have always thought that waters have their own voice, Creations speaks, gurgling and tumbling words which are divine, from our Creator. Consider this poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Sound of The Sea

The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep,
And round the pebbly beaches far and wide
I heard the first wave of the rising tide
Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;
A voice out of the silence of the deep,
A sound mysteriously multiplied
As of a cataract from the mountain's side,
Or roar of winds upon a wooded steep.
So comes to us at times, from the unknown
And inaccessible solitudes of being,
The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;
And inspirations, that we deem our own,

Are some divine foreshadowing and foreseeing
Of things beyond our reason or control.

Well, it took us all day for our smashed-up power boat to blow to shore. But we made it. And a nice stranger welcomed us to their cabin to call our parents, who, with furled brow, brought the rented trailer and we managed to pull the wrecked boat from Big Deer Lake. Thank God dad foresaw the importance of buying the optional insurance! And in the warmth of the van ride home, I ate that Charleston chew. And my loving and ever patient parents chose to laugh at our stupidity. We slept well that night in our cabin home. All was not lost.

Friends, in our deep waters, saturated with things beyond reason and our control, may our Blessed God fill our world with abundance. In the face of our helplessness and self-doubt may God's delightful smile assuage our fears. May the Living Word, coursing, rushing, and continuously spreading give us the language we need to minister and be prophetic in our day. Drop your nets. Come up from bended knee. Christ's call to radical love, proactive welcome, eye-popping inclusion, and extreme appreciation of diversity demands our attention and demands decision.

For Christ is a voice out of the silence of the deep, a sound mysteriously multiplied. Away from the shore the vertical became the horizontal, outbound and without limit, the one we call both "Master" and "Lord."

So, eat your Charleston chew, receive God's abundance, laugh heartily, for your present and forgiving God has got a home waiting for you at the end of the day.
Amen.