

Jesus Calling

Isaiah 6:1-8 Luke 5:1-11

We're following Jesus through the gospel of Luke this summer, looking at passages that tell the story of Jesus uniquely through Luke's eyes, and vision—what he calls his “careful investigation” of the events of Jesus' life and work. Luke's accounts, even where they are similar to the other gospel writers, contain more details and insight. This is one of the reasons why Luke is the longest of all 4 gospels. He pays more attention to the healing ministry of Jesus, to Jesus' ministry to people on the margins, and to the conversations Jesus had with people, and the details of some accounts that we normally take for granted.

This morning's passage is a good example of Luke filling in some details and conversation around the calling of the first disciples.

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

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

I'd like to begin by defining a word that doesn't actually appear in our reading this morning. But it does appear frequently in the gospels and the book of Acts, and sometimes in our worship liturgy and in the hymns and songs that we sing on Sundays. And I use it occasionally in sermons and don't want to assume that everyone is familiar with this word. And I'm going to use it this morning. It's the word "disciple," or "discipleship." We might talk or sing about being disciples of Jesus, or about discipleship *with* Jesus. And although the word doesn't appear in our reading today it is often used to describe what *takes place* in our reading: Jesus calling his first disciples. In fact, that is the very heading that is used in the chair Bible ("Jesus calls the first disciples"). What do we mean by that?

Very simply, the word disciple means "learner." Or student, or apprentice. One who learns from a teacher or guide. Interestingly, the New Testament Greek

word for disciple is “mathetes” which evolved into the English word “mathematics.” Way back in the evolution of language, the word “mathematics” pertained to learning in general, and the process and methods of learning, and not just to numbers and math as we understand it today.

So, disciples are learners, apprentices with Jesus; students of his way, or *The Way* of Jesus as it is called several times in the book of Acts. And I love it that Luke, who also authored the book of Acts, notes that the early Christians referred to themselves as followers of *The Way*, as well as disciples. They saw themselves as learners. People on a journey of faith. They didn’t refer to themselves as people of The Doctrine. Or, people who are Right (and others are wrong). The early church was built upon praxis—learning spiritual *practices*; learning to love God and love neighbor, in the Way (manner) of Jesus.

I say all this because with this morning’s passage we are beginning what could be called the discipleship portion of Luke’s gospel. We are going to see Jesus begin to teach and show what it means to follow the Way, the Jesus Way, which is the way of love.

So let’s see how it all begins. I would like to reflect on two aspects of this call of Jesus to follow.

1. Jesus' call to discipleship is a *joyful* call to purpose, and to potential.

It's a joyful call to purpose, and to potential. Jesus does not say, "Follow me, and I will straighten you out. Your life is a mess, you believe wrongly, and I want to save you from the fire of hell." No, it's a winsome *invitation* to be part of Jesus' Kingdom work on earth. When Jesus says "follow me and I will make you catch people," that is a joyful, winsome invitation. Even the astounding catch of fish is a joyful, abundant, winsome and surprising way to get Peter's, and everyone else's, attention. It's the pre-invitation experience, if you will.

Jesus doesn't frighten anyone into following him, nor does Jesus get out a clipboard and pen to issue a test, with a checklist of items to determine whether or not a person is worthy to follow. As we've seen the last couple of weeks, he begins his ministry by proclaiming good news, and then healing people (that's a pretty great start!), and then he—whether we call it a miracle or exceptional fishing intuition—has Peter move out into deeper water to make an abundant haul of fish. That's kind of fun.

Put yourself in that scene, witnessing what just happened. You're probably amazed, but you probably also laugh out loud. I would have!

As we see, Peter's response is to fall down and speak out his feeling of unworthiness. Btw, this isn't the first time Jesus and Peter have spent time together. Remember, Jesus and an entourage went to Simon Peter's house, where Jesus healed his mother-in-law. As we will learn later, Simon Peter's house is like home base; they come and go from there from time to time); it's a place of hospitality and respite for the group. Therefore, even as we read this morning's account of Jesus calling the first disciples, we know that Jesus and Peter already have a relationship. So, Jesus, likely, has been building up to this experience that he wanted Peter to have, in order to bring him to a place of trusting Jesus, so he'll follow.

Anyway, as a result of this catch of fish, Peter feels his guilt and unworthiness. Let's ponder this for a moment: Jesus has not said one word about anything Peter has done or not done, or whether or not he is worthy. Jesus has spoken nothing but good news up to this point in a joyful, abundant sort of way, and has shown nothing but grace and healing. Yet Peter responds to him with a feeling of guilt and unworthiness.

Why is that? By the way, this is similar to other "call" stories in the Bible: For example, **Moses** (Exodus 3); God calls Moses through the burning bush and

Moses' reaction is to say, "You've got the wrong guy; I'm not qualified." **Gideon** (Judges 6); Gideon is called and his reaction is to say, "I'm the least of my people; at the bottom rung," **Isaiah** (Isaiah 6), as we heard, his reaction is "I'm an unclean person," even though he is a priest in the temple. **Mary** says "I'm just a kid." Same with others.

In the face of good news, generosity from God, blessing, and a joyful invitation from God, why do we so often feel like we don't deserve it? Do any of you ever feel that? Thinking, what have I done to deserve any of the good that God has given me, or, who am I to do what God asks of me? Perhaps saying the very same thing Peter and Isaiah said, "Go away; I'm a sinful person."

And Jesus' reply to Peter is to say what Jesus says more often than anything else, as recorded in the gospels. Which is... (do not be afraid). Jesus telling him, "Do not be afraid" is very important here. It's easy to miss. We get drawn immediately to "*I will make you fish for people...*"

By saying "Do not be afraid" Jesus is saying, I'm not looking at your sinfulness, but at your *potential*. This isn't a worthiness test. Peter reflexively responds to Jesus' call by feeling sinful or guilty or unqualified. And it's the same with Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Mary and others, who all explained why they are not

qualified or worthy to be part of God's work in the world. This seems to be a common theme, and It's probably one of the reasons why God called these particular people. There was a humility there that God/Jesus could work with.

I mean, after this huge haul of fish, Simon Peter could have said, "That was cool; I need to bring you fishing with me more often!" He could've seen dollar signs, and tried to figure out a way to monetize Jesus' fishing insight (or his miracles). That's what you know who would do. You know, Jesus is good for business; so how can I make more money off of this?...

Anyway, in every instance, without exception, when a person recoils from the presence of Jesus/God and all of the sudden feels small or insignificant or unworthy, the response from God is always to say something to the effect of, "There is no judgement here. So you don't have to be afraid of me, or afraid of not being good enough. Get up, and get going! Your feeling of unworthiness is not the issue. My call to follow is the issue. And, my invitation to you to be part of what I'm doing in the world is what matters."

The same applies to us: we don't have to be afraid of God, because most fear, spiritually speaking, has to do with judgment, and God is not in the business

of judging us, but of calling us, and teaching us and equipping us to do good in the world. To love the world as he loves the world.

Jesus is inviting Simon Peter, and the others watching and listening to what happened, into an apprenticeship of learning and serving. Peter's fear is that because he is sinful, in his eyes at least, he will either be rejected, or maybe he'll do it wrong. But this is about God working through him, in a process of growth and learning. Not of getting it perfect. As we will see, Peter has a lot to learn, and at one point will get to the end of himself. He's going to fail. But he learns and grows, and even fails, from a place of trust and assurance, not from a place of fear. Jesus has won him over, in the best sense, and Peter can rest in his learning experience.

Again, I love it that Jesus says to him, "Don't be afraid." I'm not going to judge you, or evaluate you, or give you an examination of your doctrine. The call is not about worthiness but willingness. I see potential in you. So, come. Follow me. Learn from me. This is going to be an adventure, and you are going to find great purpose for your life, which utilizes our skills and vocation as a fisherman. Jesus reframes Peter's vocation.

So, the invitation to discipleship is a joyful one, that leads to purpose and potential. All Jesus wants is our willingness.

The second thing we notice about Jesus' call to discipleship:

2. Jesus shows up in the middle of their everyday work, and speaks to them through their everyday work.

Jesus showing up to borrow Simon Peter's boat to teach the crowd would be like Jesus showing up at a construction site and saying to the foreman, "Let me borrow your blowhorn; I have some things I want to say to everyone." Or, showing up in an office and saying, "I need your conference room so I can have a conversation with everyone."

What this tells us is that discipleship is about Jesus showing up in our Monday through Saturday lives to teach us and equip us. Now, Jesus *did* teach in religious services in the synagogues on the appointed day for worship. He had some important things to say to the already-religious people. Yet in addition to that, and more *often* than that, he shows up on the streets and in homes and in various places of employment, and wherever people gathered from day to day, to bring healing, to teach, in order to introduce them to an accessible and gracious God of love, who they *may or may not* have known already. And in *those places* and

through *those encounters*, he invites people to follow him. He doesn't give the old 'altar call' in a religious service, because the altar—so to speak—is where they live and work and play and shop and socialize. The altar is in the world. And the invitation comes from there, to everyone, in their Monday through Saturday lives.

This reminds me of an old story of a family with young children who had travelled to visit their parents/grandparents, and as part of their visit grandma and grandpa took their kids and grandkids to their church on a Wednesday night to give them a tour and show them around their church. And they walked into church sanctuary where the choir and some musicians were rehearsing, and the young granddaughter said, "Sshhhhh; this is where God sleeps during the week!"

God doesn't sleep during the week! God is awake *every* day! And Jesus meets us, and teaches us, in our everyday work and activities. The goal of following Jesus is to learn and grow and serve throughout our lives, and if we're doing things well on Sundays—and on other days during the week when we have activities and whatnot at church—we are participating with Jesus in equipping people for learning and growing and serving *out in the world*. Whether it's being a healing presence, or feeding the hungry, working for justice and reconciliation, or working for environmental causes. Or, learning how to be a better engineer, or

school teacher, or military service person, or lawyer, or restaurant worker, or elected official, or volunteer. Are we learning to live out our vocation in a Jesus-like way, day to day?

And, the big question, perhaps the most important one, Biblically, is: are we learning to be more loving in everything we do? Because, ultimately, that is the way of Jesus. Jesus is going to teach his disciples the way of love, which he, even up to this point, has modeled for them—particularly through his healing ministry.

Jesus tells Peter, “From now on you’ll catch people,” and what Peter and all of the disciples and anyone who follows Jesus will learn is, we catch people with love, and through love. Otherwise (to quote the apostle Paul in a well-known passage), “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but have not love, I am but a noisy gong or a clanging symbol,” right? I’m just fingernails screeching on a chalkboard. This is what undergirds the Way of Jesus: love. Because Jesus himself shows that he is a lovable person to follow. As God in the flesh, he embodies love. Who *wouldn’t* want to follow him?!?

When an invitation is issued to follow Jesus, or a presentation is given about who God is—whether that presentation is with words or actions, whether from the pulpit on a Sunday or in someone’s living room or a coffee shop or on a walk

or wherever, the test for any presentation is: is the God being presented one that can be loved?—with heart, soul, mind and strength? If the thoughtful, honest answer is, “No, not really,” then a person necessarily needs to look elsewhere. It doesn’t matter how sophisticated the approach is intellectually or doctrinally. If it fails to set a lovable God—a radiant, accessible, joyful, and trustworthy being—before ordinary people, then something needs to be set right. Not everyone will respond immediately. Not everyone responded to Jesus by following him. It’s always a matter of timing for a person. Yet, the message always need to be: God is love.

Mother Teresa once said, “There is more hunger in this world for love and appreciation than there is for bread.” Perhaps overstated to make a point, but she’s not wrong about that. .

We will have more to say about this as we go along, because Luke presents a Jesus who is lovable and loving—and a Jesus who teaches about, and presents to people, a lovable and loving God—and who teaches his disciples how to *be people of love* in a world that is hungry for it. It won’t always be easy, because Jesus is going to teach his followers how to love people who are difficult to love.

It will be joyful, though, and fulfilling, as he sees our potential and our gifts, and calls them forth.

We're going to sing a new song, "From the nets of our labor..."