

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Fish for People" retitled: "Into the Deep"

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11; Psalm 90:1-2, 14-17

Hymns: When morning guilds the skies 438 Praise: "I'm gonna live so God can use me" "I will arise" "Cry of My Heart" "Step by Step" Will you come and follow me 634 I know not why such wondrous grace 683

January 22, 2017

Rev. Steve Filyk

There's been lots of debate
 whether Donald Trump is fit
 To serve as President of the United States.

There are questions about his character.
 And there are concerns whether he's up
 To the rigors of the job.

Being President...
 is no cakewalk.

Just consider this brief description
 Of a typical presidential day:

The president's official day begins with... [a] Daily Brief...
 It provides the president with sensitive intelligence
 on international matters and events...

The president then moves into a series of meetings...
 [briefings with] his Cabinet officers...
 meetings with White House staff and congressional leaders...

Most days also involve delivering remarks
 to one or more groups of citizens...

Various press events also are part of the schedule...
 Other important events include meetings with foreign leaders,
 which may include hosting a state dinner...

The president's out-of-town schedule is [also quite] grueling.
 [including...] official visits to important allied countries,
 [and] participation in international meetings
 [as well as] political events in key states...

Imagine a day in which the president must deal
 with an intelligence report of a planned terrorist attack,
 a crisis in the Middle East,

dire financial news from Europe,
 [or] a domestic hot-button issue...!

There's been lots of questions
 Whether Trump is fit to be President.
 But one thing is clear:
 he's not afraid to take the job.

How about you?
 Would you be willing to accept such responsibility?

Most of us wouldn't want to make the sacrifice.
 Most of us wouldn't feel that we have
 The skills or the abilities
 The stamina or the personality
 That the job requires.

Well you can all relax.
 No-one is going to ask you to be President.
 But sooner or later
 Someone is going to ask you
 To do something that you consider difficult, challenging,
 Something you aren't quite prepared for...

So how will you respond?
 Will you give it some serious consideration?
 Or will you immediately write yourself off
 As lacking the requisite skills
 And necessary qualities?

There can be wisdom
 In saying 'no' to jobs
 That are outside our areas of competence.

And yet Jesus has this habit of inviting his followers
 To join him in deep waters,
 Outside our comfort zones.

You already heard today's Gospel lesson.

Jesus has launched out into his public ministry
 And has drawn a big crowd on the beach
 Beside the lake of Gennesaret,
 The Sea of Galilee.

I am told that on the Sea, near Capernaum
 "there is a sequence of steep inlets...
 with each inlet
 forming a natural amphitheatre.

[And that] To this day,
 if you get in a boat
 and push out a little from the shore,
 you can talk in quite a natural voice,

and anyone on the slopes of the inlet
 can hear you clearly—more clearly, in fact,
 than if you were right there
 on the shore with them."ⁱⁱ

Jesus has launched out into his public ministry
 And has drawn a big crowd on the beach
 At the Sea of Galilee.

Needing a good P.A. system
 Jesus asks a group of nearby fisherman,
 To take him out onto the lake.

And so the fishermen launch their boat
 And Jesus delivers his teaching.

And when he is finished, when it is all over,
 He returns to them again.
 He asks them to head out deep water
 And let down their nets.

You'll recall that when Jesus approached them
 Those men were just getting off shift,
 Cleaning their nets after a fruitless night of fishing.

They granted Jesus' request
 To take him out into the water.

But now this teacher
 Wants to help them with their trade?

At the wrong time of day?
 When they already know
 There aren't any fish?
 When their nets have already been cleaned?

It seems absurd.

So when Jesus makes this request
 Peter reminds Jesus that were working all night
 And didn't spot a single minnow.

All the same, maybe because Jesus made an impression,
 He says they will humor him,
 and give it a shot.

What follows is something that none
 Of those fishermen expected.
 When they brought up their nets
 They weren't empty.

Nor did they grab just a few fish.

The nets were overflowing,
 so full they were beginning to tear apart.
 Even when they got help from shore
 The haul was almost too big to manage:

The boats were so full they started sinking.

Peter was terrified.
 There was no natural explanation for this.
 It could only be the hand of God.

And so, like prophets of old
 Peter crumbled in his unworthiness.
 "Master, leave." He begged.
 "I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness."ⁱⁱⁱ

But instead of focussing on Peter's sins, his unworthiness,
 Jesus calls him to a new job, a new vocation:

"Don't be afraid [Peter];
 from now on you will be catching people."^{iv}

Catching people?
 Sneaking up behind people
 And putting a bag over their heads?

It's helpful to have a little clarity
 About that task Jesus is giving to Peter.

"The word that [Jesus] uses (i.e., "catching [or taking] alive")
 is used in the Greek Old Testament
 for saving the lives of persons from danger..."^v
 Less the job of a fisherman
 And more the job of a lifeguard.

It's quite the request
 That Jesus is making of Peter.
 I mean Peter's work has been getting food to market
 Not saving lives.

If someone had offered him such a job
 Earlier that morning,
 I'm sure he would have laughed it off

'The only kind of saving I'm doing
 is for my vacation!'

But as Peter looks at the hundreds of fish
 overflowing those boats they had dragged to the shoreline,
 How could he refuse?

PAUSE

Sooner or later
 Someone is going to ask you
 To do something you never imagined doing.

So how will you respond?
 Will you give it some serious consideration?
 Or will you immediately write yourself off
 As lacking the requisite skills
 And necessary qualities.

Saying "No!"
 Because the task is just too 'big' for you?

There can be wisdom
 In saying 'no' to jobs
 That are outside our areas of competence
 Or beyond our capacity.

And yet as this story reveals,
 Jesus often beckons people
 To join him in deep waters,
 To go beyond their depth
 To move outside of their comfort zones.

Jesus doesn't call Peter and company
 "because they have exhibited gifts and graces for apostleship
 [let alone fishing]..."

[Peter] is not called to “catch people”...
 because he will be good at it,
 but because Jesus can do it through him
 (just like Jesus did with those fish).^{vi}

Has Jesus been asking you
 To step out in faith
 To venture out into deeper waters.

Have you been ignoring him?
 Pretending not to hear his call?

The reality is that Jesus isn't always looking
 for our skills or our competence,
 sometimes Jesus is just looking for our availability.

When Jesus was looking for disciples
 He didn't go to the Seminary,
 he went for a walk on the beach.

ⁱ “The President’s Typical Day in Washington, D.C.” Greg Rushford
www.dummies.com/education/politics-government/the-presidents-typical-day-in-washington-d-c/

ⁱⁱ N.T. Wright *Luke for Everyone* 53

ⁱⁱⁱ see Luke 5:8 MSG

Now please don't go out and blindly accept
 The next opportunity that is placed before you.

'Pastor Steve, someone invited me to volunteer for PAC chair.
 I'm gonna say 'Yes' because if someone is asking
 Then God must be calling.'

No, this is not an invitation to blindly accept
 Those tasks that others might place before you.
 But it is an invitation for serious discernment
 Especially when the tasks seem big or scary.

You see, while you may not feel competent,
 Jesus is more than adequate
 And God will graciously work through you.

May we discover this to be true.

Amen.

^{iv} Luke 5:10 NRSV

^v Craig A. Evans “Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C; Luke 5:1-11” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 330-331

^{vi} O. Wesley Allen Jr. “Commentary on Luke 5:1-11”
www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3000