

Scripture

Luke 5:1-11

Going Deep

Deep

“Put out into the deep water.”

—Luke 5.4

The deep is not out there, of course,
but within, deeper than words and ideas,
deeper than feelings and images,
past murky depths of deeper fears,
wounds submerged and mossy,
in the dark of the utmost terror and joy,
dreams shifting in the half light,
light shining down into the dark mystery,
the unseeable deeps,
the sea-deep silence, dense and still,
where the subterranean seam of blessing
rivers through unnamed hurt,
beyond you, in dark holiness,
where you are pressed in on but perfectly free,
as if the deeper and darker you go the lighter it is,
in the depths that know you, wait for you,
where everything only is—
there,

grace swims, shimmering, always beneath,
seldom visible, always deeper.

- Steve-Garnaas-Holmes

In the last month I have had so many conversations with folks who are caregivers, leaders, teachers, and ministers about covid fatigue and burnout. The effects of this last wave have been traumatic to many.

What at the beginning of Covid felt to some like a gift of being able to stop and not do so much feels less like a gift and more like a curse now.

One of my best friends had a baby this week while her husband sat in the parking lot of the hospital because he wasn't allowed to go in with the other children and being it was 4am and they were isolating from everyone for safety and protection of mom and the new baby they were alone. One day it will just be a story to tell. Today it's heartbreaking for dad that he missed the birth of his babe and mom felt very alone in what was an overwhelming and challenging birth. They are all fine and healthy but.... Deep down it churns.

Luke's story of Jesus calling the first disciples is unique among the synoptic Gospels. This text we just heard from Luke can be heard both as an acknowledgment of a time of emptiness and bleakness, as well as encouragement for discipleship and recognition of Jesus as the source of hope and abundance.

Luke's story shares common elements with John's post-resurrection story of Jesus meeting his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. As in John 21:1-10, we see a futile night of fishing, Jesus offering some unsolicited fishing advice, an overwhelming catch of fish, and a recognition of Jesus' identity that focuses especially on the response of Simon Peter.

In Luke's Gospel, this is not Simon's first encounter with Jesus. Jesus has already been to Simon's home in Capernaum and has healed his mother-in-law (4:38-39). That probably explains why Simon is willing to let Jesus use his fishing boat as a stage for teaching the crowds. Simon had been fishing all night with no success, then working from the early morning hours cleaning his nets. Most likely he was exhausted and looking forward to going home and getting some sleep. So it must have seemed a bit of an imposition when Jesus got into Simon's boat and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Nevertheless, Simon did what Jesus asked (5:1-3).

Luke does not tell us what Jesus taught the crowds that morning. The focus is on what follows. Jesus tells Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon has been fishing all night with little to show for it so he probably does this with a bit of resentment and considers it a futile exercise. He is the professional fisherman, after all. We can almost hear the exasperation in his voice when he responds, "Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing." But then he continues; "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets" (5:4-5).

We know what happens next — nets so full of fish that they begin to break, boats so full of fish that they begin to sink. Seeing what is happening, Simon is overwhelmed with fear and wonder, sensing that he is in the presence of divine power. He responds by falling down at Jesus' knees and begging him, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (5:6-8)

Simon is caught by surprise. In the midst of his ordinary daily grind, and in fact, after a particularly lousy night at work, he is encountered by one who changes everything. Amazed by the power of God displayed in the abundant catch of fish, Simon is immediately aware of his unworthiness. He sees the overwhelming disparity between God's power manifest in Jesus and his own mortal, compromised life.

But Jesus responds as Jesus always does, with love and grace reminding Simon to not be afraid and then letting him know that now his task is wider. He is not only to catch fish but he is also to catch people.

The Greek word for “catching” used here (*zogron*) is rare in the New Testament, but means “to catch alive.” Jesus calls Simon and his partners to a new vocation of catching people so that they might live, a life-giving vocation of being caught up in God’s mission of salvation for all.

Although they have just brought in the greatest catch of their fishing careers, Simon Peter, James, and John leave those boatloads of fish behind and follow Jesus (1:11). Their encounter with Jesus has completely reoriented their lives.

This text offers rich possibilities for reflecting on how God calls ordinary people to discipleship and mission. After all, there is nothing the slightest bit extraordinary about Simon Peter and his fishing partners. They are simple fishermen, and they are simply doing what they did every day. They are minding their own business, cleaning their nets after a long, particularly discouraging night of work, when Jesus comes along, enters into their utterly normal, mundane lives and changes everything.

Jesus calls Simon and his partners as they are. Simon is acutely aware of his unworthiness, but Jesus is not put off by this in the slightest. Jesus does not ask Simon to get his act together, his resume prepared, and then come back for an interview. Rather, Jesus encounters him as he is, tells him not to be afraid, and calls him to a new mission of catching people.

So what does this have to do with any of us? Most of us only fish on occasion and the idea of going out and catching a load of fish in the middle of the night in the deepest part of the lake seems a bit irrelevant. Lets remember however every story in scripture symbolizes a deeper truth.

The night time on the water symbolizes a difficult dark time and or season. So here is what I saw when I read this in my context this week. A context where people are struggling, lost, despairing feeling empty. We all feel like we are trying to fill our lives with something. Anything that will give us liveliness, abundance, hope. So we are pushing through the motions and the work of everyday. Living on the surface, not going too deep, because we don’t want to rustle too much up.

You pretend you are doing okay but you feel unworthy, miserable. The anxiety and anger that has surfaced in the last months is exhausting and well... quite frankly kind of embarrassing. You are afraid that someone might see you or you might have to admit to yourself that this is who you are deep down. So you remain on the surface of life things, protecting yourself from actually needing to transform because what if... Nothing changes.

Throughout Scripture we see that human sin, failure, and inadequacy are no obstacles to God. God calls imperfect people to do God’s work, people who are aware of their unworthiness and are often doubting and resistant to God’s call are who God uses most.

Simon Peter's resistance to Jesus stems not only from his sense of unworthiness. He initially protests Jesus' instructions to go out into the deep waters and let down the nets because he is convinced that the fish are not biting. They have worked all night and caught nothing. We can hardly blame him for his skepticism.

How often do we resist who we are called to be because it just seems too crazy, too impractical? We refuse to risk, or go deep or transform.

So often do we avoid putting out into the deep waters. By this I mean doing the work of meditation, prayer, counselling, going deep into our lives because we are convinced that we will not see any results. Or the work will be too hard. But what we choose is survival rather than abundant life or in theological terms Salvation?

What might it mean for us to go deep-sea fishing with Jesus — to trust and follow him outside our comfort zones, to let go of our certainties, to have our lives radically reoriented?

This year for has a new mantra for me and I am holding that mantra for each of you. I am - Jesus said. Jesus calls us to discover our own I am. Who am I. What am I called to do and be. Are we living that as individuals? As Church?

Jesus didn't wait for the disciples to be 'perfect' they didn't think they were ready to share love and grace and abundance with others. Jesus said it doesn't matter. I don't want you on the service of life, just getting by. I want your life to be overflowing.

Steve Garnaas wrote a reflection on this that I couldn't help but share. He wrote from Luke 5.8 which says

*When Simon Peter saw it,
he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying,
"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"*
—Luke 5.8

Garnaas Holmes writes

Don't believe the voices you hear
coming up out of the grave in your head,
snaking around you from the shadows,
saying you are not worthy.
Yes, a miracle shimmers under your feet,
yes, you draw wonders from dark mysteries,
yes, you hold the shoals of heaven in your hands,
yes, glory you can't yet see is more than we can bear.
Yes, and you are worthy,
you are worthy.
The miracle beneath the surface

is not yours to hide.
Open yourself, and be astounded.
Then get up off your knees and come.
The world needs that light.

Come into the light. You are worthy, you are called, you are loved. No matter who you are. No matter what you are going through. You are beautiful.
If you need help understanding this, believing this give me a call anytime and we can figure it out together. Or find people and opportunities in your life that remind you of the gift you are.

Amen.