

Epiphany 5C
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
February 6, 2022

Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalms 138
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 5:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, for you are our Savior and our strength. Amen.

My dear ones in Christ, as we read the Holy Scriptures week upon week here in worship and day upon day in our personal devotions, I hope that you are able to see that there is a beautiful intricacy to be found – how so many teachings and themes and lovely details are knit together in each of the Gospel stories that we read. I am reminded of some white napkins that my mother left for me. White napkins nicely folded into quarters. Placed in a drawer in the linen chest. White napkins for special meals. And as I pulled them out as a child, I noticed something more – these seemingly plain white napkins had a satiny floral pattern subtly woven into them. These were white napkins – this is true. And they were so much more. They were damask napkins.

And as we read Bible stories that are familiar to us, they may look like plain white napkins. But upon closer look we may see that they are more than simple stories that we have heard time after time. I rejoice that Spirit in her wisdom knit a multitude of details and layers of meanings into a simple story, details and layers of meanings that each invite us to ponder and wonder and dig deeply as we grow in faith.

Today's Gospel reading is familiar -- you know, that one where the disciples couldn't catch any fish but Jesus came on the scene and all that changed and there were more fish than any of them knew what to do with. Ta-DAA!

But because this is a damask napkin, there is more to this story. Let's look at the things that changed in the course of this story because as we know, Jesus changes everything.

Simon and James and John were going about their daily work. Jesus came and changed it all. They were winding up their daily tasks and Jesus sends them out on to the Sea of Galilee again. WHAT? Do this differently says Jesus – go out into the deeper waters – new waters for that particular day's or night's work. WHAT? We know these waters Jesus.

Then there's the way that Simon speaks to Jesus. He addresses this Jesus, this one who the crowds had heard so much about, this one who stepped into his boat – and addresses him in a formal way – one that conveyed “supervisor, Boss, Manager.” All right, as you say. Yes Sir.

And then there is a catch of fish, the extent of which we can only speculate – but it was two boats full, to the extent that these boats were in danger of sinking. These boats – not row boats, not fishing skiffs. No, these were nearly 30 feet long and 8 feet wide and 4 feet deep.

Seeing this, pulling in those fishing nets, maneuvering this massive boat, worrying for his life,

seeing the nets starting to break, Simon is moved, stricken, humbled at what is unfolding before his very eyes. He falls to his knees and Simon recognizes a new relationship and calls Jesus “Lord.” – And says to him – I am not worthy to stand before you.

And then we hear that James and John are kicking into gear as well because their boat also was overtaken with this abundant catch. These business partners of Simon’s are now called more like companions, more like besties – it’s the same root that we use for koininia in the church – knit together because we are members of the very Body of Christ.

Jesus’ presence in this boat on this sea with these unlikely followers – his very presence changed everything. Their relationship with Jesus changed from boss-man to Beloved Lord. Their relationship with each other changed from business partners to disciples in a new fellowship one with another. Their work changed from pulling in nets of fish to engaging and sharing new life with God’s people. Jesus sent them from the shallow places to the deep.

And that is where our most profound and significant experiences of God are to be found. God breaks into human lives when we are willing to move outside of our comfort zones, when we go all in and say, “Here I am, Lord. Send me,” even in the face of uncertain circumstances. Maybe it’s a call to a new job when we know perfectly well how good our old job is going. Maybe it’s a call to engage in new volunteer work someplace where the need is great. Maybe it’s as simple as a call to a new relationship with a new neighbor.

And we wonder and consider what the call is to us here at Grace as a community of faith – what nets are we to let down in our neighborhood and community? What new relationships can be forged? What new lives can be touched? How will this be shaped by our relationship with Jesus and with one another? What are the deeper waters? Certainly with the pandemic and our foray into our online presence, we cast our nets into deeper waters. But Jesus never says, “OK, that’s good, stay put, stay where you are.” No, he persistently beckons us to reach out further and further. In fact, from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth or from our own town, to our region and then to places that seem risky and far.

There will always be doubts: “Lord, we have worked all night and caught nothing.” But once we move to “at your word, Lord, we will go” that’s when miracles happen. That’s when we get out of our own way. That is when Spirit has room to move and breathe and nudge and grow and beckon and call.

And we see that the response of Peter and James and John was simple – they left everything and followed Jesus. Now, it may be tempting to set out and start to list everything that we think we and perhaps others ought to leave behind, to let go of. But that misses the point entirely. It’s not the mere release of “things” in our lives or our life together as a church. Instead, we are to release those things that impede the work to which we have been called.

Some years ago, there was a movie called “Wild.” It is the true story of a woman, Cheryl Strayed, at a crossroads in her life. She turns from all that is familiar and decides to trek the

Pacific Crest Trail – 1100 miles from the Mojave Desert to the mountains in northern Washington State and she, a novice with no experience. So she went to the outdoor equipment and sporting goods store – REI. She got one of those really large back packs, a small tent, a camp stove, a small coffee pot, a sleeping bag, pillow. She packed a number of books to read along the way. Also food stuffs, water and water bottles, a first aid kit and extra medicines. An extra pair of hiking boots and clothes and jackets and on and on and on. I went and saw the movie and was amazed at one particular scene.

Cheryl was in a hotel near the starting point of the trek. She was packing her pack and bags. Arranging all of her things. And then finally, she puts the pack over her shoulders, gathers up her other things and goes to stand up. And she cannot. She goes through a variety of machinations to get to her feet. All unsuccessful, and frankly, comical. Finally, from a position on all fours, she leans against her bed and manages to stand up. And off she went.

At one of the first rest stops along the way, she is exhausted and aching and her feet are blistered. One of the old pros who is there sees her, urges her to stay and rest for a few days and then they sort through all of the gear that she is carrying. Coffee pot – gone. Extra shoes – gone. Books – gone. Cook stove – gone. Portable shower – gone. Lighten the load. Toss the things that are not really necessary. Get rid of the things that impede you reaching your goal.

So, we too are in our boats and Jesus calls to us – cast your nets deeper.

What are the deeper waters that we are called to?

What is the destination for our trek?

What do we anticipate will be the result of our efforts?

What overwhelming catch may be before us?

In response to this amazing love of Jesus and the abundance that he pours into our lives, we set out. What are we to leave behind?

What are we enamored with that charms us so?

What are we trying to carry that makes it so that we can hardly stand up?

What if we traveled with a lighter load?

We heard God's call to the prophet, Jeremiah – his response was, "I'm too young."

And God's call to Moses – his response was, "I don't speak so well."

We heard God's call to Isaiah – his response was, "I am a sinful man."

We heard Jesus' call to Peter and James and John and their response was – "We already tried that."

May our faithful response be "Yes, Lord, we will do as you ask us. Yes, Lord, we will go where you send us. Here we are. Send us."

May it be so – Amen.