

It is sometimes difficult to listen to these familiar stories. Over the years of their telling, they have accumulated so many layers of meaning and interpretation that we sometimes hear only what we've decided they mean rather than hearing what they have to say that might be new or unfamiliar.

This story about the call of Simon Peter might be a good example. Simon is a fisherman; he's used to catching things for a living. When Jesus comes along, he leverages Simon's natural talents and abilities and gives them a new target: "From now on you will be catching people." It's a nice story about what discipleship means, and an example of how God uses the gifts and skills we have—even skills completely unrelated to anything vaguely "churchy"—to further the work of God's kingdom; but is there more to it than this?

One thing you might notice about this story is Simon's reaction to this large catch of fish. How does he get from "Holy smokes, that's a lot of fish!" to "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"? A less observant fisherman might have offered Jesus a job after a haul like that, but Simon sees something deeper happening here.

The call to stop and listen—such as the way Simon pays attention to what is happening or in the way we try to listen more deeply to this familiar story—is at the heart of our observation of the Season of Creation this year. We take this time to set aside our normal routine and enter into a time of listening and contemplation so that we might hear those voices we normally tune out; the voices of those who suffer the impacts of climate change, the voices of folks from other communities and cultures who hold wisdom about how to live in harmony with our planet rather than in dominion over it, and, ultimately, even the voice of creation itself.

Those whose vocation is to observe these voices—folks like climate scientists and ecologists—can tell that something is not right. The dynamic balance in which our world exists is shifting rapidly; too rapidly, perhaps, for us to adapt. Changes in climate that have previously happened over the course of eons are now happening over the course of decades. In today's story, Simon learns something valuable by listening to the voice of creation. Today we are invited to ponder what there is for us to learn from our own listening.

As I observe what is happening in our world, one thing I see is a lot of unintended consequences. It is no one's goal to change the climate or drive species to extinction, yet these things happen as a result of our actions. For example, of particular concern to us in the Pacific Northwest is the salmon population. There was a time when the salmon were so abundant that they

not only sustained the natural predators, but entire human communities, as well. When, in the march of progress, we did things like dam rivers and clear forests and any other number of things that adversely affected the balance, the salmon numbers began to dwindle.

It makes me think of Job. Job is well known for his suffering, but the book bearing his name is the poetic account of him and his three friends attempting to explain *why* he suffers. His friends are convinced that, because God only punishes the wicked, Job must have done something wrong. Job, on the other hand, asserts his own innocence and even comes to the conclusion that God has wronged him, that God's unfairness is to blame for his suffering.

In the climax of the story, which we begin today, God shows up in person and asks, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" As God questions them about their vast experience and wisdom, it becomes clear that they don't know nearly as much as they think they do. No, they weren't there when God laid the foundations of the earth. No, they haven't commanded the dawn or walked the recesses of the deep. God's point is this: how can they—to whom all of these things are unfathomable—possibly know why God does what God does?

I wonder if perhaps we also darken counsel without knowledge. We think we've got all these things figured out: we can make electricity from running water and plastics from crude oil, we can build cities and automobiles and space stations, but do we really know the full ramifications of doing any of these things? We know how to get what we want from the land, but do we know what the land needs in return?

There are those who know. There are people who have lived in balance with these things from time immemorial, who have not only survived but thrived alongside creation. They are still here, and their wisdom is not entirely lost. And, of course, if we are willing to listen, the land itself and the creatures in it tell us what they need.

God answers Job out of the whirlwind to humble him, to remind him how little he really knows. By the end of the book, Job still doesn't know *why* any of these things have happened to him, but he has learned that nothing is as simple as he thought it was. In Luke's Gospel, on the other hand, I notice that Simon isn't humbled by his experience with the divine—at least, not in the way we typically understand humility. Instead, he comes away from the encounter empowered.

When Simon first discerns that something bigger is going on, his response is humble: "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man!" He feels that he has no business being in the presence of such holiness. Jesus, however, begs to differ. He invites Simon to follow him, to join him. Instead

of sending him away, Jesus draws him closer. Jesus invites him to listen to what the lake and the fish are saying to him.

The massive catch of fish isn't just a neon sign pointing to Jesus. It is, first and foremost, a message of abundance. In Jesus' presence, waters that were empty just hours before now teem with fish. But the abundance is not limited to the lake. Jesus takes that sign and interprets it as a foreshadowing of what is to come: "From now on, you will be catching people." The implication is clear: just as Simon and his friends brought in this huge number of fish, they will similarly bring in huge numbers of people to hear the good news.

This is already happening: at the beginning of the story, Jesus is surrounded by such a crowd that he has to teach from a boat. Even these crowds, the story seems to say, are nothing compared to the crowds of people who will hear the gospel Simon and James and John and those who come after them will continue to proclaim—crowds that will continue to grow through the passing millennia.

In each story, both Job and Simon are mistaken about their role in the story. Job thinks too much of himself, and Simon too little. In each story, God intervenes to tell the truth about who they are. This is the real definition of humility: not self-effacement or denigration but telling the truth about who one is. The truth is that both Job and Simon are important players in God's story. Job's lesson is for us as well as him, as is Simon's. This is why we continue to tell the stories.

With that in mind, what is the truth about us and how we fit into God's story now? Perhaps, like Job, we think too much of ourselves. Maybe we are overconfident in our abilities or give our own desires too much weight. But maybe we are also like Peter, believing that we are too small, too insignificant, too sinful to be a part of what God is doing here. The voice of creation says otherwise: we have been destined since before the foundations of the world to be adopted as God's children. We have already drastically reshaped the world around us; if we can do this for the worse, then perhaps we have equal power—and equal opportunity—to do this for the better.

For a long time, we have believed that the story of salvation was just about us: humanity. And yet, since the very beginning, the voice of creation has testified to the interconnectedness of all things. All creatures thrive together, or they all languish together. Species come and go, systems and balances shift, but when stability is found, it is always in the equilibrium of everything within that system. Why should humans be special when the same God who created all this also created us?

Even Paul, writing 2000 years ago, saw this. In Christ, he saw God's plan for the fullness of time revealed: a plan to "gather up... all things, things in heaven and things on earth," together in Christ. This abundant and prodigal salvation is what God does. Before human intervention reduced their numbers, the innumerable salmon in the rivers and the sea testified to this abundance.

Maybe that's even how Peter recognized Jesus. Maybe it wasn't his power to command the sea or the fish, but the unmistakable sign of abundance that convinced him—abundance so great that it actually destroyed his livelihood! He caught so many fish that his nets were torn and his boat nearly sunk. Never before had he experienced that kind of abundance; but in following Christ, his life was defined by it. "Don't worry about the nets and boat," Jesus says to him, "you won't need them anymore. From now on, you'll be catching people."

Today we hear about what the voice of creation had to say to both Job and to Simon, how it testifies to God's mystery and love. What does creation have to say to us? I wonder if the abundance of the earth—even after so much abuse and neglect from us—might in itself testify to what God can yet do. They say the salmon were once so abundant that a person could walk across the rivers, from one bank to the other, without ever getting wet. Might the voice of creation be inviting us to experience such abundance from God again? What wisdom is waiting for us in these ignored and silenced voices that might help us to find our way to that abundance?