

HOMILY

Proper 5 C

Luke 5.1-11

St Peter, Quamichan

9.2.25

Jesus approaches Simon and his partner (do you think it might have been his brother Andrew?) because he needs help. The crowd is pressing in on him, he has the lake at his back, and he needs a place to sit down. “Whose boat is this?” he asks. Or then again, maybe he is already acquainted with Simon (Jesus has visited Capernaum before), and he knows. “Simon,” he says, “may I borrow your boat?”

Likewise, James and John get into the act because Simon and his partner need help. “Hey, you two, hurry! Our nets are breaking.”

Luke says, “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything, and followed him.”

Funny, you know. I had always thought of Jesus choosing the Twelve because it was simply accepted that any good teacher would have a following. I thought he would thus concern himself primarily with what kind of learners they would be. I even imagined that he sought a group with complementary — if not exactly congenial! — personalities. But here I begin to see that Jesus picked the disciples, not least, because he needed help. The mission was getting to be bigger than he could handle alone. And so (unencumbered by search committees, and the need to assure himself that he had the budget to pay for all this extra assistance!), he sets about asking people to join him.

It is, I suggest, a liberating insight. *We* are here because God needs our help. Yes, we are learners. Yes, we are followers. But we have been asked to the meeting, (moved to come here, moved to commit ourselves to the Christian way) because God takes us and what we can offer so seriously that he won't go on without us. Church isn't just about what we can get out of it (nor even worse, what inadequate sinners like us *need* to get out of it.) Church is likewise about what God's world needs to get out of *us*. *We* matter.

And lest we worry that we haven't got much to offer, let us take heart from the story of Simon.

In the first instance, what Simon had that Jesus needed was a boat.

That is all. And he didn't even need to *keep* the boat: he only needed to borrow it. There isn't one of us who hasn't got something God could use: the kind of smile that makes people feel good about themselves, the time to help someone with a walker plough through an unshovelled sidewalk, a passionate sense of justice. We have plenty to offer.

But secondly, Simon brings life experience which Jesus is able to use as a kind of window on discipleship. By which I mean this: Simon is a fisherman. Jesus, in calling him to join the Twelve, frames the invitation in precisely the language of the fishery. "From now on," he says, "you will be catching people."

I would like to suggest that each of us brings from our life's vocation a language and viewpoint which can elucidate something of what it means to be a Christian. I, for example, used to be a nurse. Over the years, people have remarked again and again how readily I choose organic imagery to make a point. In much the same way, who do you think gave us the language of redemption? Or of forgiving our debts as we forgive our debtors? It was the financiers, of course. One redeems a bond: this is incontrovertibly financial language, which we have imported into our theology as a useful mechanism for understanding the work of Christ. And Simon offers the metaphor of fishing, of catching people.

If so disparate a group as nurses, bankers, and fishers can bring their own vocational experience to illuminate what it is to be Christian, I assume that the same must be true of nearly anyone. Part of what we can offer, to God and to each other, is our outlook.

At bottom, my point is simply this. We are needed. No matter who we are, we have something to add. And until we do, God is standing back to the water, waiting on us.