

2025 02 09 – *Fishing with Grace*

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

As you all know, in our lives we make many decisions both large and small. Some are just daily choices such as: what to have for dinner, what will I wear, will I stay in and watch the game on TV or go out this evening? But other choices impact not just one day, but the entire direction of our lives. They include things like: How will I make a living? Where will I live? Who will I marry? How many children will I have? When will I retire? What will I do in my retirement?

When I was younger I thought that once I hit thirty I would have my life figured out and all those big decisions would be behind me. But as I grew older I realized that we never really stop making life-changing choices. Every stage of our lives requires us to make decisions. For me, having made the decision to retire from full-time ministry this year, I now find myself wondering what I will be called to do next? What path will I be taking?

In today's scripture reading a fisherman named Simon is being asked to make one of those life-changing decisions. From the previous chapter in the Gospel of Luke, we know that Simon has already heard Jesus preach in the synagogue in Capernaum and that Jesus actually spent some time in Simon's home with his family. While he was there, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. So Simon has heard the good news of God's reign of peace and justice and he has witnessed the healing power of the Spirit of Love flowing through Jesus.

So when Jesus shows up one day on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee, Simon is quite willing to offer his fishing boat as a platform, a place to sit, while Jesus preaches to the crowds that have gathered. By pulling the boat a short distance from the shore, Simon is able to give Jesus the space he needs so that his audience can both see him and hear him.

When Jesus finishes the day's lesson, he suggests to Peter that he should go further out into the deep water and lower his nets for a catch. This is when we find out that Simon and his shipmates, have been up all night fishing with very little success. Simon is reluctant to take the nets that they have already started to clean and to put them back in the sea. He agrees only because it is Jesus who is making the request.

After catching nothing all night, suddenly their nets are full of fish, so full that Simon is worried they may break and he signals his partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to bring their boat from shore. The fish fill both boats so full they are in danger of sinking.

Simon is struck with awe. He is filled with both reverence and fear. He realizes that Jesus has a direct connection to the Holy Mystery and that God's power flows through him. Simon is obviously a practising Jew with some understanding of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. He has been brought up to believe in a wrathful God, a God that punishes those who do not follow the rules. Simon, remembering all the times that he has faltered in his life, remembering all the mistakes that he has made, says, "Leave me Rabbi, for I'm a sinner." Simon

does not believe that he is worthy to even be around someone who is so obviously filled with the divine spirit.

But Jesus responds, “Don’t be afraid, from now on you’ll fish among humankind.” Jesus is asking Simon to follow him. He is calling Simon and asking him to be one of his disciples.

You can just imagine the thoughts that are going through Simon’s head in this moment: “Wait a minute, I just told Jesus I was a sinner and now he’s asking me to go fishing with him. I’m not even worthy to be around him and he wants me to follow him. I struggle to fish in the sea and he wants me to go and fish among humankind?”

How many times in your life have you struggled with a difficult decision, struggled to answer God’s call because you were afraid, because you didn’t think you could do it, because you felt unworthy. We are all imperfect and we all struggle with those negative voices in our heads. I struggled with my own fears and anxieties during my last semester at Emmanuel College. Despite doing well at school, and having a successful student internship, my mind was filled with voices telling me that I wasn’t good enough. Every doubt that had ever crossed my path on my way to ordination suddenly came back for a last stab at my confidence. All my insecurities, my fears, my anxieties returned ... it was as if they didn’t want me to follow my call. For a while I was paralyzed by these voices and was unable to complete my classroom assignments. I am no different than any of you. We all struggle with fear and doubt.

Simon would have been confused also because he was no doubt aware of what, “fishing for people” meant in the Hebrew Scriptures. That particular image was used by several of the ancient prophets and it was never positive. For example when Jeremiah talked about fishing for people he went on to say, “Nor are their sins concealed from my sight. I will repay them double for their corruption and their evil deeds” (Jeremiah 16:17b-18a). Simon had been taught that fishing for people was all about retribution and punishment.

But Simon had also heard Jesus preach about God’s love and he had witnessed Jesus healing his mother-in-law. He knew that Jesus taught forgiveness and mercy. Jesus taught that his God was a God of grace. So I’m thinking that Simon figured out that Jesus was turning the Hebrew understanding of God upside down. Jesus had fished for Simon but he wasn’t about to punish him. Instead Jesus was asking this imperfect human being to be a part of his ministry. Jesus was fishing with love and mercy. Jesus was fishing with grace and he was asking Simon to join him. Our scripture reading suggests that Simon and James and John must have believed in God’s grace because they “left everything and followed [Jesus].”

When I was filled with doubt, when I was paralyzed with anxiety, I went to the people in my life that I trusted: a woman who knew me deeply and was able to name what was happening to me; a mentor who assured me that my skills were good enough and my faith was deep enough; and a mother who fed me while I spent several days finishing the papers that I needed to write. Those women

were the ones who embodied God's love and compassion, God's grace, so that I could fulfill my call and follow Jesus.

What is the next choice in your life? What is it that you are being called to do? Is it a life-changing decision like moving or taking on a new vocation? Or have you been asked to join a committee or take on a leadership role here at this church or in our community. Whatever it may be, I invite you to struggle with those fears, those thoughts of unworthiness, those wonderings about time and commitment. I invite you to allow God's grace to enter your mind and your heart. I invite to join with the Holy Mystery and go fishing with grace.

May it be so. Amen.