

## Luke 5:1-11

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 5:1-11** Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

### Claim:

God turns small acts of faith into abundant returns.

### Focus:

God calls us to take small asks of faith in response to injustice in the world.

### Function:

To encourage the congregation to think about what God is asking them to do and to respond with small acts of faith

## **God's Abundance**

Today we read in the Gospel of Luke about the story of Simon Peter's call as a disciple to Jesus of Nazareth

We find Peter in Gennesaret, a town south of Capernaum located on a small plain along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, or the lake of Gennesaret, as it is called here. It is a natural lake, fed by the Jordan River, about 7 miles wide and 13 miles long. Simon Peter is wrapping up a night spent fishing and is washing and mending his nets. He has been watching Jesus for some little while. He had probably heard Jesus preach at the synagogue.

(and may have witnessed the man exorcised of the demon cry out 'Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'" Just after that event in Luke's gospel,)

A little earlier in Luke, Jesus had gone to Simon's house and healed his mother-in-law of a fever. And so, it probably did not surprise Simon to see Jesus being followed by a crowd along the lake of Gennesaret, in fact, he may have known that Jesus would be there that day.

Peter had had a bad night. He, and his partners who worked together in a fishing cooperative, had worked hard all night and didn't have much to show for their labor. They had to pay for the rights to fish in the lake to men such as Levi, the tax collector, and then retained only a percentage of the profits after selling the fish to the contractors. In addition, they had to

pay the hired men who worked in the boats, rowing and bringing in the catch.<sup>1</sup> Their catch that night was 'worth nothing' meaning that after all their expenses they had probably just broken even.

There is some speculation that the Sea of Galilee during this time may have been over taxed in both senses of the word. Not only had the Romans turned the fishing industry into a profit making enterprise through the taxes collected, the Romans had developed a taste for fresh water fish, fish sauces and fish stews and the small lake may have been over fished, as well. So perhaps, this was not the first night that Simon Peter had come up empty.<sup>2</sup>

At any rate, Simon was disappointed in the night's take and a little 'poor in spirit' when Jesus showed up along the lakeside, being followed by a multitude, pressing against him, like groups typically crowd around famous people. Jesus was being pushed and shoved; people were trying to get near him, to touch him, to have him touch them, when he saw Simon working on his nets.

Even though Simon was tired, he took Jesus out in the boat, just a little way off from the shore. Listening to Jesus gave him time to forget about his problems and the motion of the lake had always calmed him down. It isn't recorded what Jesus said that day, not that it wasn't important, but it paled in comparison to what happened next.

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<sup>1</sup> Vos, Howard F. New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. p.457.

<sup>2</sup> Wylie-Kellermann, Bill. The Power of Alliance: Why the church and the labor movement belong together. *Soujourners Magazine*. September-October 1998. <http://www.sojo.net>

Maybe they had talked as Simon had rowed out on the lake or maybe Jesus just 'knew' that Simon was depressed, just like he 'knew' where the fish were that day.

Knowing what Simon needed, Jesus asked him to row out to the deep waters, and then told him to let down his nets for a catch. Simon protested, "Master, I am tired, we worked all night. We went to all the best fishing spots, we even went to the second best spots, and there aren't any fish. But, since I trust you, I will let down the nets." We kind of get the sense that Simon did it a little half-heartedly, not really believing he would catch anything.

But when he brought up the nets, there was such an abundance of fish, that they nearly tore the nets in two. Simon motioned to his partners who were still at the shore to come over and help. And when they brought up the fish, it filled both boats to the point of almost sinking both of them.

Simon looked at the fish in the boats and then looked at Jesus. And suddenly, Simon 'knew' who Jesus was. He "felt himself in the presence of One who represented the Holiness of God." And his response, like the response of Isaiah, was like the response of many who have found themselves in the presence of the Lord.

In awe and reverence, he fell down on his knees, and said, "Get away from me Lord, for I am a sinner." Up until now, Simon had called Jesus 'Master', a title similar to teacher, but now Jesus was revealed as 'Lord', a title reserved by the Jewish people for God alone. In that moment, Jesus, the

messiah, was revealed to Simon Peter, and Peter was revealed to himself. For, in the face of God's perfect abundance, we are imperfect and limited creatures. In the face of God's presence, God's overwhelming abundance of light and love, we are revealed as what we are, mere humans—with human limitations, with doubts and insecurities, with selfish needs and desires.

And Jesus, knowing once again, what Simon needed, knowing Simon's strengths and limitations, said "Do not fear." Don't be afraid. I am here to help you and you will help me. From now on, you will not catch and kill fish. From now on you will catch people—for life! You will catch people and bring them to the Way of life everlasting."

And after returning to shore, Simon Peter, and his partners, Andrew, James and John, left the fishing business—left everything behind, and answered the call to be a disciple of Jesus the Christ.

It is interesting to note that seemingly small acts of faith can reap large harvests when God is involved. All Peter did was to listen to Jesus' direction to row out to the deep and let down his nets. An act he had done many times before at a different time of day in many different places. But the fact that he did it response to Jesus—that he trusted Jesus, made that one time different than ever before—made the results different than ever before.

I am reminded of another story of an act that had been many times before, but on this occasion—had very different results. It is the story of a person

who sat down. That is all she did—she sat down. It was an act that had been done many times before but on this occasion, it was an act that had long and large consequences. It is the story of when Rosa Parks sat down in the front seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

In his book, *Let Your Life Speak* Parker Palmer relates a part of the story that you may not have heard.

“Legend has it that years later a graduate student came to Rosa Parks and asked, “Why did you sit down at the front of the bus that day?” Rosa Parks did not say that she sat down to launch a movement, because her motives were more elemental than that. She said, “I sat down because I was tired.” But she did not mean her feet were tired. She meant that her soul was tired, her heart was tired, her whole being was tired of playing by racist rules, of denying her soul’s claim to selfhood.”

“Rosa Parks sat down because she had reached a point where it was essential to embrace her true vocation—not as someone who would reshape our society but as someone who would live out her full self in the world. She decided, “I will no longer act on the outside in a way that contradicts the truth that I hold deeply on the inside. I will no longer act as if I were less than the whole person I know myself inwardly to be.”<sup>3</sup>

She knew she would be arrested for breaking the law, “she had no guarantee that the theory of nonviolence would work or that her community would back her up. It was a moment of existential truth, of claiming

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<sup>3</sup> Palmer, Parker J. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. pp. 32-3.

authentic selfhood, of reclaiming birthright giftedness—and in that moment she set in motion a process that changed both the lay and the law of the land.” Within a year after her action, the Montgomery bus system was integrated.

Rosa Parks was tired—she had come to the end of herself,  
moved out into the deep water,  
committed a small act of faith,  
an act she had done many times before,  
God set in motion an abundance of activity,  
and the community came to her support.

The call receive as Christians is not always to leave everything behind, or even risk being put in jail in an act of non-violent resistance—few receive that call.

Some receive a call to commit small acts of faith where they are...  
to be a voice for *people* in a business only concerned with bottom-lines;  
or to be voice of integrity in governments increasingly known for corruption;  
or to show care and compassion to students,  
young brides and grooms,  
or possibly, someone on the streets.

However, it may be a call to move out into deeper water,  
To move into the flow of God’s abundant action in the world.  
And it starts with just a small act of faith,  
To something we’ve done many times before  
in a different way, for a different purpose

because we're tired of the injustice in the world.

Like writing letters...

Taking a walk...

Cooking a meal...

Speaking the truth...

It is the call to live out of God's abundance. And it is answered by starting with just a small act of faith.

God's call is to do the things you love to do,  
maybe in a different way than you've done them before,  
in response to a need felt in the world.

To move into the flow of God's abundant action in the  
world.

And, if you get in over your head...

Don't worry, there is a community behind you to help you out.

Let us pray.

God of abundant love who calls each of us by name,  
we thank you for the many ways that you move and speak to us in our lives  
today. We thank you for taking our small acts of faith and turning them into  
large blessings for others. We ask for those seeking direction in living out  
your call, that you give them your guidance this week, so we all may live  
out of the abundance you provide. In the name of your son Jesus, who  
showed us the way of life everlasting. Amen.