

No Experience Necessary

Luke 5: 1-11

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A young woman I'm holding in my prayer has an interview tomorrow at Drexel for admission to medical school. It has been a long and grueling journey to get to the point of scoring an interview. Fortunately she's had the assistance of a wonderful advisor, who's helped prepare her with a mock interview; encouraged her to do a practice run to Drexel; coached her on how to dress for the interview; and who's offered these words of wisdom: "relax and be yourself". The hard truth is that she has a one in five chance of being accepted. Despite all her preparation the big question remains: will Drexel judge her worthy of their program?

You may have your own story of wondering if you have the right stuff, what it takes to be chosen for a team, or a school, or a job or . . . something else. We hear in today's text the story of Jesus choosing and calling his first disciples. Through this story we are invited to ponder the qualifications to be called to be a disciple. And to wonder if we have what it takes.

Luke puts a lot of detail into this story. There's the crowd who long to hear Jesus, whose reputation has spread far and wide. They eagerly press in upon him, straining to hear the word of God that he teaches.

There are the fishermen, off cleaning their nets apart from the crowd. They've had a lousy night of fishing. All they want to do is to put away their nets and go home to sleep.

There's Jesus who has been traveling from town to town, speaking with authority in the synagogues, healing the sick and delivering those afflicted by demons. He's gained quite a reputation by proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of God's kingdom breaking in among them. He is bringing hope to those who long for it.

There's the miraculous catch of fish that brings Simon to his knees as a sinner as he recognizes he's in the presence of God's power manifested in Jesus. Through this amazing catch and encounter with Jesus, the lives of these ordinary fishermen are changed in the blink of an eye. After a long night of disappointing fishing, they leave the catch of a lifetime to follow Jesus and become his disciples.

But the detail that catches my attention most of all in this story is when Jesus steps into the boat of a distracted and weary fisherman caught up in the grind of cleaning his nets after a long unsuccessful night. Jesus doesn't ask permission. He simply gets into Simon's boat and enlists him to put some needed space between him and the crowd. And wonder of wonders, Simon agrees and his life is forever changed.

That is the surprising and mysterious way of God. Jesus meets weary fishermen and people like us in the ordinary places of our lives, where he invites us to join him in the work of God's kingdom. He doesn't wait for us to get our act together, or to update our references and resume, or to come in for an interview before he invites us to follow him as disciples. In fact he has a way of enlisting those who seem least qualified for the work of God's kingdom. Then he equips them for their call.

Just as Jesus steps into Simon's boat, he meets us in ordinary and mundane circumstances of our lives, inviting us to deep waters. Perhaps he takes refuge under your roof, or stands behind you at the check out, or slips into your pew or takes hold of your walker as you head for the door. And before you know it you find that all your excuses and fears do not disqualify you from joining him in the work of God's kingdom. Jesus takes us just as we are, then shapes us to become the person God intends us to be.

Simon and the other disciples walk away from their life of fishing, the only life they've ever known, to follow Jesus. That's how it is for some people. But "for most of us, when we encounter Jesus, we aren't called away from our work and lives that we're living. Rather, Jesus calls us to see our ordinary work and lives as a channel through which the living presence of Jesus is made real in the world." ¹

I love being part of this church where Jesus is being made real through disciples like you who are sharing the work of God's kingdom through ongoing ministries and missions of the church and through those being birthed through the implementation of our 2020 Vision. Jesus is also being made real through you as you share in the work of God's kingdom in the ordinary settings of your lives, letting down your nets right where you are.

For instance new worshiping communities beyond our building now join us for worship each Sunday via the live streaming of our worship service. People in three separate retirement communities are gathering to worship with us from their location. Two are in our area and one is in Ohio.

People who have difficulty getting to church are now able to worship with a Christian community under their own roof. This precious gift is possible because someone among them encountered Jesus calling them to deeper waters in their retirement. Faithfully responding to Jesus' call to let down their nets where they live, new worship communities have sprung up.

In 1972 I experienced the call of Jesus as a teenager while on a mission trip with my youth group to Wilkes Barre, PA. We went to help dig out basements in homes flooded by Hurricane Agnes. I would say that Jesus stepped into my boat in Wilkes Barre through the people I met and the enlargement of my vision and sense of being called to a greater purpose for my life. Little did I realize that God was also using us to make a lasting impact on the lives of the people we were helping.

Thirty-three years later a church in PA, where I was serving as a pastor, sponsored a bus to transport people from our community to Mississippi to help with recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. As we began the long ride to Mississippi, each person on the bus shared their name and how it was that they were on this trip. A couple on the bus introduced themselves and explained why they were going on the trip. They had never done anything like this before. But seeing the pictures on TV of the devastation caused by Katrina, they were moved to want to help. They shared that when their house was flooded during Hurricane Agnes, that God sent people to help them dig out their basement. Now they wanted to pay forward what they had received.

And so it is that God's kingdom comes . . . breaking in through people like you and me going about our ordinary lives until Jesus meets us in an unexpected moment and invites us to let down our nets.

"Through our baptism we are called to participate in God's mission to the world in Jesus Christ. We are called to align our priorities with God's priorities, to use the gifts God has given us in service to others, to share the good news of Christ in our words and actions."²

None are truly worthy or qualified for this call. Yet all are invited. No experience is needed. "Jesus calls us in spite of our frailty, failures and doubts, in the midst of ordinary, busy, complicated lives to let down our nets. And we trust that he will work with us and through us to catch others just as he has caught us in the deep, wide net of God's mercy and love."³

¹ Peter Eaton, Feasting on the Word Volume C

² Elisabeth Johnson, Working Preacher,
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1560

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https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1560