

Epiphany 5, Year C, February 6, 2022
Luke 5:1-11
Epiphany, Winnipeg

Last week I started out the sermon by asking what it might be that would make you want to throw someone off a cliff. This week is a different question: What would it be that would make you want to drop everything and follow someone - that same someone the crowd tried to throw off a cliff last week – to follow someone to who knows where just because they said “Don’t be afraid. You’ll be catching people now.”

It’s a question about our life, because every day Jesus say to us, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you’re catching people.” We’re not reading a detached story here, all about someone else. This story is about us. “Don’t be afraid. From now on you’ll be catching people.” And then we...well...what do we do? Why?

I’m often asked how it is that I ended up being a pastor, and sometimes people ask how it is that I felt called to this. My response is always kind of a long and rambly one – you yourself might have been subjected to it a time or two – that would start somewhere in grade nine or ten and end up fifteen years later in Rhein, Saskatchewan. It takes me about ten minutes, but the easy answer and the one that gets right to the point would be, “I don’t know. It just kinda happened that way.”

But if someone said, “How did you become a follower of Jesus?”, I’d start by saying something about Baptism. That’s when it started: Signed, sealed, delivered. That’s when I was met on the shore by Jesus, who showed me where to catch fish and then called me to something new. I was only 64 days old, but that’s

when it happened. The details after that are hard to pin down. I just know that there are a lot of people involved.

How did God call you to be a teacher, or a university student? God has called you to that. How did God call you to be an engineer or a welder, how did God call you to sell insurance or do someone's nails for a living, how did God call you to be a truck driver? How did God call you to be retired, how did God call you to play soccer, how did God call you to be looking for a job, how did God call you when you lost your job?

And how were you called to become a follower of Jesus? Like me you might start the answer with Baptism, or maybe you wouldn't. But what brought you there? What brought you here? What brought you to follow Jesus?

Our answers might be long and rambling or short and to the point or clear or muddy.

We heard this story of Peter and James and John and all their co-workers who fish for a living.

How would they answer the question? A fishing crew, maybe along with a few of the women who became part of Jesus' little group of followers....Simon, James, John, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, all of you who might have been there on the shore that day, how did you come to be followers of Jesus?

It's a strange turn of events: Simon and his partners have just had what's probably the most successful day at work that they've ever had. They finally get all that fish ashore – enough fish to sink two boats – so there are these boats with all those fish which is really like having all those boats with all that money, and

they just walk away from it. They walk away from that miracle and all it could do for them and they follow Jesus to who knows where.

Simon, James, John, Mary, Joanna, how did you come to be followers of Jesus? Maybe one of them would answer, "I saw all those fish and I knew this was someone special." Another might say "I saw all those fish and I thought that if I follow Jesus around I might get rich." A third one would say "I saw all those fish and they could have made me rich but for some reason, for some reason, I left." Another might give a long answer like mine that would take ten or fifteen minutes, but the straight answer would just be, "I don't know, I just went where Jesus went next."

But we never hear those answers. The only thing anyone says after all the fish are caught is "Go away, Lord. I am sinful, sinful." Nobody says "Wow!" Or "Thanks." Or "Could you do that tomorrow too?" Or even, "Could I come with you?" Simon just says, "Go away. I'm sinful" Maybe he is or is not saying that he's a bad person who has done bad things; who knows? But he has nothing to offer in response to what Jesus has done. All he's got is a small confession. And some fear. And "Go away."

But Jesus stays. In response to this fisher with nothing to offer Jesus says, "Don't keep on being afraid. From now on you'll catch people." And then they all leave everything and go with Jesus. They leave behind the biggest catch and boatloads of income and something predictable to follow someone who finally says, "Don't be afraid." You think you're weak? Don't be afraid. You're a sinner? Don't be afraid. You've got nothing to offer in return? I can live with that. Don't be afraid. You're on the right side? Don't be afraid. You're on the wrong side? Don't be afraid. They leave behind everything to follow someone who will gather

up people wherever he goes: the poor ones, the rich ones, the women, the men, the children, the ones who are sick and the ones who are well, the ones no one else wants, the ones close to home and the ones who have travelled from so far away, the ones who are devout and the ones who aren't devoted to much.

They leave behind everything to be with someone who happily hangs around with the ones who have nothing. They leave everything to follow someone who will show them how to fish not for money, or boatloads of stuff, or success or power, but for people. To fish for people, not for their money or their numbers. To fish for all kinds of people, not to fish for everyone who agrees. To fish for people because everyone needs to hear, "Don't be afraid. Whatever you have or don't have, whoever you are or are not, don't be afraid."

Right now in Ottawa there's a trucker who Jesus met a long time ago and called up out of the water, and this trucker is sitting in his cab and honking his horn and he's mad and frustrated and afraid and Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." Just a block away is a woman whom Jesus met a long time ago and called up the water, and she's losing her mind because she hasn't slept for a week and the horns on the trucks just go on and on and on. And Jesus says "Don't be afraid."

It doesn't make it easy to fix everything. How do we get out of this? I don't know. But there is this simple thing to remember, and that is that on every side of every big or little disagreement we've had in the church or the province or the country or the world are people who Jesus met on the lakeshore and who he called up out of the water and now we all travel around together with Jesus. And Jesus has not ever given up on us. And he will not stop saying, "Don't be afraid. You're catching people now." And his net keeps getting bigger, because he will

never let our best or worst efforts pull us apart. The net's big enough to contain the whole church. The net's big enough to contain the whole world.

Jesus met this gang of people on the shore that day. For some reason, they dropped everything and followed. They gathered up a few more people along the way. And those ones gathered a few more – the nets just get bigger – and they kept catching people and gathering them together, and then one day, there we were: Sitting on the couch in front of an iPad or a smart TV, or hunkered over the phone at the dining room table, or sitting in a church with 5 other people, looking forward to the day or fearing the day, feeling like we've got it all or fearing that we've got nothing, and Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Now you're going to fish for people." And we leave all our stuff on the shore, and follow Jesus into our lives; we follow the one who gathers up everyone who has nothing; we follow the one who gives everything. AMEN.