

Today we read from Luke 5, but just to remind you. Jesus has started his public ministry. After reading from the scroll in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, he narrowly escapes alive because they want to throw him off a cliff. Jesus then goes to enact the Kingdom of God. He goes to Simon's house and heals his mother in law. This is not the first meeting of Jesus and Simon, whom we know becomes Peter.

Luke 5:1-11

5:1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,

5:2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

5:3 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.

5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

5:6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

5:7 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.

5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

5:9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken;

5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who are partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

5:11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Proclamation of the Word

Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

Over the next month we will be focusing on Sharing God's Abundance.

God made us, so that all we are and have belong to God.

Our talents, our skills, our bodies, our money, our love- all belong to God.

And we are given the task of sharing in the mission and purposes of God.

Life is a gift!

We were made to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

And to tell others that good news.

As a way to give witness to where we see God's abundance, we invite you to take time to write that on a leaf.

It may be a place, a ministry, a group, persons where God's abundant grace is shown.

You will help us fill out our own tree until it is flourishing and full.

Today's Scripture of Jesus and the Calling of the Disciples is filled with abundance.

A very real catch of fish bursting their nets, in fact.

And every little detail points us to the joy of God.

Some of you have been fishing and known that kind of joy of the catch.

Unlike Simon Peter, and his partners James and John, most of us do not have to fish for a living, but do it for fun.

It is a leisure skill taught on campus not a career path.

My friends who fish, love the quiet time to think. A waiting with purpose.

My early fishing memories are joyful.

My Grandma had a cabin up near Caesar's Head, off Hwy 11.

I remember her getting the cans of corn and helping us pack up.

Before Chacos or Texas, we took our old tennis shoes and cut the toes out for wading in the water.

My father, Grandma, and brothers would fish for trout in the Saluda River.

I was too little to fish, but would rock hop and enjoy the cold water on my feet, all the while holding on to Grandma's hand.

That is a memory filled with abundant joy- time with my family, time outside, time to play, and enjoying the fresh catch for dinner before the Saturday night Square Dance.

President Jimmy Carter wrote, "Many of the most highly publicized events of my presidency are not nearly as memorable or significant in my life as fishing with my daddy."ⁱ

Abundance! Joy! Life!

This encounter with Jesus is all of those things, too.

A few things that I love about this Scripture.

First, Jesus shows up at their work place.

Jesus meets us in the ordinary places of our lives.

He shows up when we are tired, overworked, or when we have nothing to show for all our efforts.

Then he just gets in Simon Peter's boat.

Jesus does not really ask permission, he just takes command of the boat.

God comes into our lives whether we call on him or not.
He shows up and through the power of his presence brings abundant life- fish to feed the crowds.
Jesus is Lord over all things- the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, of you and me.

Secondly, I love that Jesus hears Simon Peter's excuse and asks him anyway to do something for Him.
Jesus' call can be an inconvenience to His followers.

We make excuses, "Jesus, it is not the best time or can we just wait until the kids are older or I am unworthy, too tired, or really too busy with my own plans,"

Jesus asks something of us anyway.

Jesus has a mission to bring abundant life to all God's people.

Many of us know things that make us feel like a failure, to feel weary and worn out.

Or we are stuck in work that is not a good fit for our gifts.

When our gifts do not match the task, like English classes for the STEM student or Math class for the Humanities student, the task can be frustrating and hard.

When we are doing something that is life-giving, that fits our talents, we can feel the difference.

I cannot tell you how many people I talk with after a Habitat work day or

a mission trip or who serve home communion to members of our church family who cannot attend worship anymore or

even after a meeting as leaders,

they will say they were tired, but it was a "good tired."

We are doing the things that serve God's kingdom, building the Beloved Community, and following Jesus.

Maybe some of it is about being where God's people need justice, joy, compassion, and peace.

And when we serve that mission, we are blessed.

We unplug from stress or screens, and are present with people as Jesus was.

We realize that those we went to serve, teach us about God and bring us perspective.

Thirdly, Jesus asks us to give our time, even when we are tired, and to use our nets (which they had just finished cleaning).

Jesus wants our stuff, our boat, our energy.

Our friend Phil has a home on Lake Keowee.

Phil would give you the shirt off his back, do anything for you.

He rarely sits still and loves to serve.

When we gather with friends at his house, he is always making sure everyone has what they need, but there is one thing Phil will not let you borrow, his boat.

Now all the boat owners are nodding.

Boats are big investments and even risky placed in the wrong hands.

Jesus takes Simon Peter's boat.

Probably the most valuable possession and tool he has and uses it.

When we look at our stuff, our possessions, I wonder, how much are we willing to allow Jesus to use it?

Look what happens when we place these things into His capable hands.

Amazement, awe, abundance.

I can think of so many of you who have allowed God to work through you, opening yourselves up, offering your skills, talents, selves for God's work. A couple of things came to mind this week.

Recently I was talking to Maggie, who has found her new calling. She ran a retail store for years, Tickled Orange. Today she is using those management, retail, and customer service skills through the new Seneca DREAM Center thrift store. Her clientele is very different, but her work is serving the needs of our neighbors. And in that work, she spreads love and joy and receives it abundantly in return.

Early fall, we found ourselves scrambling to maintain our vital youth ministry. People have stepped up, stepped in. Youth Ministry is led by a whole team of servants: meal coordinators, teachers, advisors, committed parents, covenant partners- probably over 30 adults regularly involved. I recall Chuck trying to make sure we had enough adults to help with the back to school retreat, and they needed one more driver. So Cathy Olker committed with little notice to share her boat, her Prius actually, her time and love. Just one example of someone sharing with Jesus what he needed to do his work!

Christ followers are sharing God's abundant gifts for God's mission.

Like Simon Peter, we respond with awe and a healthy fear of the Lord, amazed at what God can do.

Jesus takes our boat, our nets, and makes use of them.

And they compelled by amazement, take off and follow.

People are caught up in God's goodness and love.

Which leads us back to Jesus' words, "I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly."

Jesus sends us out to catch people- not to possess or own them, not to nab them.

We are not called to coerce or manipulate.

In fact, the word for "fishing for people" means "Catch alive" (*zograeo*- related to word *zoe* which means life).

God wants all his children to be fully alive, not half dead, living empty lives.

Of all the things that catch us- our attention, our hunger and need, our desires,

God desires that we be fully alive in his loving purposes, to know healing and peace, to be born from above and live in the Spirit.

Jesus sends us out this week to gather with those who need to hear words of compassion, peace, justice, and joy.

And not just words- but action.

Simon Peter, Jesus, James and John drop their nets to live out that mission.

Jesus names his purpose in Luke 4 when he read from the scroll of Isaiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus' mission is the Church's mission.

And collectively we have work to do, but it is life-giving, life-changing work, the kind that is a good tired.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we want to be your disciples. You have heard our excuses, and called us anyway. Take over our boats- our skills, our talents, our resources, and put them to work for your purposes. May your Spirit working in and through us, help us to bring abundant living to those we encounter this week and as we do your work as a church. Amen.

ⁱ quoted by Adam Hamilton. Thankful to Hamilton and his book *Simon Peter; Flawed but Faithful Disciple*, Chapter 2 for his insights which are integral to this sermon. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.)