

Fishing for Talent
Luke 5:1-11
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If you were Jesus and you had to pick your first disciple, your top associate, your right hand assistant, who would you call? What skills or qualities would you even look for in such a person? You'd probably look for someone with good personal skills, an ease of public speaking, well educated, attractive, energetic, not too demanding, travels well, eats little, sleeps even less, and they would never forget to say their prayers. Maybe you'd run a Donald Trump 'Apprentice' type job interview, sending your prospective disciples on scavenger hunts throughout Jerusalem. Of course you'd call all of their references, check the status of their kosher keeping habits, and quiz them endlessly on their theological leanings. And then after weeding out several thousand applicants the last one, the very last one to cry, or snap, or fall asleep on the job would become The Apprentice, The Beloved Disciple, The true confidant of Jesus. At least that's how Hollywood would glorify the biblical call process. But that's not actually how it went, actually that's not even close to how it went. But how did it go? How did those first disciples get selected?

In Luke's gospel, the first disciple Jesus calls is Simon known to us as Peter. We find Jesus in the boat with Peter on the Sea of Galilee. It's an ironic scene with Jesus, the carpenter, giving fishing lessons to Peter. Jesus had probably grown up with more hammers in his hand than fishing poles. And Peter was an expert fisherman but for some reason that night

the fish weren't biting. Peter and his fellow fishermen had docked their boats and were washing out their nets. Today just wasn't their day. But Jesus, the carpenter, asked them to try again, try something new, try a different spot just out a little further. "Master," Peter responds, "we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Now I'm not a fisherman but from what I have observed, professionals of any sort do not like to take tips from others. It's sort of like the novices telling the coach how the practices should go, or the concert attendee telling the musician they were just a little flat, or the attorney being given prosecuting tips from the mailman. We, the professions, like to think we've got it all under control. I can imagine Peter, the professional fisherman, might have felt some of the same resistance to Jesus' advice. But despite the free advice he didn't ask for and despite the improbability of a successful cast Peter threw out his nets again, just a little further from shore and just a little deeper in the water. And of course when he did the nets were overfilled. They caught so many fish that their boat started to sink and they had to call over other boats to help them bring in their catch.

Jesus used a miracle to call Peter, to convince Peter that he was worth following. And in reaction to the miraculous catch Peter falls down at Jesus' feet, saying "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter professes his sinfulness maybe because he anticipates Jesus' forthcoming call to discipleship.

It is a theme in biblical call stories...resistance. When we see God calling prophets and leaders their first reaction is often one of reluctance and excuses. Abraham and Sarah said they were too old; Jeremiah said he too young; Moses said he was too inarticulate; Paul said was too invested in the other side. And so too with Peter, he says, “not me, I’m too sinful.” But Jesus isn’t concerned with Peter’s sinfulness; he doesn’t even address Peter’s confession. He just tells Peter, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be a fisher of people.” Jesus uses a metaphor from Peter’s own trade to explain what a holy calling he might have as a disciple. Jesus “talks shop” with Peter the fisherman, meeting him in the boat, on the water, with net in hand. It’s on Peter’s turf that Jesus meets him and that Jesus calls him. He could have calmed the storms or made water into wine but instead Jesus caught fish.

It’s not that Jesus wants to use Peter solely for his fishing abilities. Jesus doesn’t say to Peter, “Peter you are the best fisherman I have ever met and I’d love for you to join my group of disciples catching fish for my revivals and my friends.” Jesus says to Peter, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be a fisher of people.” God doesn’t ask for Peter’s ability but his availability. Jesus isn’t looking for a polished apprentice but for people who will stop making excuses that they are too young or too old, or too faithless or too faithful, or too busy or too unqualified. God can fulfill God’s mission without us but chooses to work through agents and means, even agents and means as mixed up as Peter the fisherman, Joseph the carpenter, David the Shepherd and as you and I.

That's what is so radically different about a divine calling than a Trump calling. God doesn't look for poster children, the fit and trim, the smart and savvy. These things mean little to the good news and even less to God. God calls us not because we have skill sets that fit perfectly with a job to be done. God calls us because we are created in the image of a God that equips and enables us for service. Certainly this is true for Peter; throughout the gospels we see high points and low points in Peter's life, times of great confession and times of great disappointment. At times he stands beside Jesus and at times he falls asleep. At times he leaves all to journey with Jesus and at times he hides himself in the crowds. Peter is by no means a perfect apprentice, but Jesus doesn't ask Peter to be someone that he's not. He asks him to be himself. Peter, do not be afraid. Peter, be firm, be strong, be courageous, be the rock on which I can build my church. Peter, be yourself, a fisher of people. Throughout Peter's life and ministry he would no doubt remember his first fishing trip with Jesus. He would remember the catch of his lifetime. He would remember how he was called by Jesus, despite his sinfulness, despite his failures, despite his stubbornness.

This call story of Peter's comes to us as words of comfort and encouragement. So often we are told to be something other than what we are. That we need to speak or act or think or dress a certain way. We need to be smarter, or hipper, or sexier. If only we could be a little bit more like so-and-so? In a world with entrance exams, personality assessments, interest inventories, we are used to being told that we should

be doing something else, we would be happier elsewhere, we would be more efficient in another place. But that is not what Jesus says to Peter, he doesn't say, "Peter if you could be a little less Peter and a little more John the Baptist that would be great." He doesn't say, "Peter stop all this fishing business I'm going to make you into a preacher." He finds Peter where he is, he speaks to Peter in language he can understand, and he calls Peter to live into the person that he already is.

We should not sell ourselves short, thinking we have little to offer the church or one another, as God's called people we have been richly blessed. Each one of us is unique and talented and full of potential. We all have talents of some sort or another and Jesus is calling us to realize our full potential. Put your nets out one more time, just a little further, just a little deeper this time. Be who you are! Not just a fisher but a fisher of people. Be who you are and who you are called to be.

Jesus' call to Peter in the boat is a similar call that we experience at the communion table. We are called at the table to step forward as God's children, despite our differences, despite our doubts, despite our shortcomings. We do not come because we are qualified or deserving of God's grace, we come because we have been called, called from where we are and as who we are. We are told to not be afraid. Voices of shame, fear, pain, exclusion are not heard at this table. It is God's voice that calls us, God's hands that welcome us, and God's church that supports us. We come to

the table to be united with God and with one another. And as we come we proclaim that we remember who we were call to be.

Amen!