

“The Calling Misunderstood”

At 10 a.m. on February 6, 2022
York United Ministries
Virtual Worship hosted by New Hope United Church
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

Let us pray: God of steadfast love and faithfulness, you have exalted your name and your word above everything. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to hear your word with understanding, that in our speech and actions, we may exalt your name above all things; in Jesus' name we ask. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: 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, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. 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 Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 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. 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!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

<Reflection>

My first fishing experience, as far as my memory serves me right, happened with my father when I was Gr. 4. It was not that exciting because we spent all day long very quietly; doing nothing but breathing and blinking. My younger brother and I had to keep silent under my father's supervision, my mother silently served lunch, we even whispered to each other to talk, but unfortunately we didn't catch any fish. We all were so disappointed. On the way home, my father tried to change the heavy mood and decided to have dinner at a seafood restaurant. And the meal was satisfactory. Was the goal of the fishing trip to maximize our enjoyment at a seafood restaurant? He is a semi-serious angler, yet still, we go fishing when I visit him.

Today's Bible passage from Luke continually prompts my fishing experience. For those of us who have some fishing experience too, we can understand how the fishermen, Peter, his family, and friends, felt with the empty boats. They must've been so exhausted, starved, and concerned due to their labour all through the night and their empty hands. With their total powerlessness in the early morning, they had Jesus on board to make a speech for the people. They also listened to his teaching. After the morning lesson, Jesus asked them to throw their net into the deep water. "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."¹

Their net was already washed, but they didn't refuse to cast their net again. Surprisingly they caught a lot of fish, so much that it could've torn their net apart. All of a sudden, Peter, being overwhelmed by the scene, confessed that he was a sinner and asked Jesus to leave him: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"² It was like an I-know-you-are-the-super-star-but-leave-me-alone response. So, did Jesus leave him and make him alone? No, he didn't leave him alone. Rather, he approached him closer and said: "Follow me." Modern North Americans may be really angry and say, "I said leave me alone!" However, the passage says, Peter and the young men at the

¹ Luke 5:4b.

² Luke 5:8c.

scene followed Jesus from then until the end of their life, leaving their boats, nets and their father.

This passage from Luke details many dramatic moments of the scene, so we may focus on the miracle of catching fish, the fishermen's obedience, or the moment of repentance. Or some readers may even focus on the last scene of giving up their jobs and father. From these arbitrary accentuations, some Christians may conclude the value of obedience too much and result in being misled. I met more than one person who questioned themselves to quit their job, like Jesus;' disciples, in order to follow Jesus. I cannot say in all cases, but in many cases, I found that they were trying to find a plausible reason to quit their boring job. Of course, like Peter in the passage, some people may quit their job as a fisherman and start any type of life as Jesus' disciple. What I'm saying is that the focus of the story is not about the fishermen quitting their job to follow Jesus but about following Jesus sincerely regardless of whether they quit their job or not. Their sincere and authentic process of discernment of being Jesus' disciples shouldn't be ignored in the passage. Be aware that they had a period of time to be the disciples of Jesus, and Jesus' invitation was not just a one-time incident.

Because of the mixed or skipped reports of the Gospel, we could misunderstand if we read only Luke. Peter, including his brother and friends, had already known Jesus prior to the conversation happened in the passage today. They visited Jesus before, had learned from him privately and publicly, and could've been invited to the new movement with him. When they heard the invitation, they must've hesitated or felt unsure. Although Jesus knew their inner struggles, he didn't stop knocking at their hearts; Jesus repeatedly invited them, hinted, felt out, and nudged them to be his disciple. In this respect, we can understand Peter's answer; "Go away from me." Jesus changed his strategy to make them his disciples: Showing that he is the master of the universe, even of the fish in their net. When Peter was confronted with the awe that cannot be fully explained, he decided to follow Jesus. Therefore, his whole and thorough process of discernment that includes the miraculous experience made him follow Jesus and leave his job; it was a natural flow to him.

This logic reveals a profound foundation in our faithful life. When we decide to do something for Jesus, it should be a natural and voluntary decision that is driven by Jesus, not by something that should be done or by some forceful situation that pushes our limits. I mean, Peter followed Jesus based on his thorough discernment, not because his fishery market deflated. When we voluntarily choose something, driven by our Christian faith and love, not by a forceful regulation, the authentic power of the Holy Spirit will work through us.

It must be tragic if we *have to* do something that we really don't want to. I read a funny joke about going to church. "I don't want to go to church." "Okay, my son, why is that so?" "They are singing boring songs." "And?" "They are talking about boring topics." "And?" "I'm tired and want to sleep more!" "And?" "The worship time is too long, and I'm bored to death!" "Is that it?" "Isn't it too obvious that I shouldn't go to church?" "Oh my son, still you have to go because you are the minister of the church!" Yes, it's funny. What a poor church minister he is! And yet, I think the joke tells a lot. Faith or faithful devotion cannot be forced. Our faithful life and dedication need a voluntary and natural discernment like Peter's time of discernment. We sometimes feel like we have to do something that we don't want to or are reluctant to do. You don't have to do that, and you are probably not going to do that. Like Peter, who had first refused the offer from Jesus, the master of the universe, we too wouldn't do anything but give the leave-me-alone request, because we need some time for discernment. And we shouldn't forget that Jesus was continually and softly nudging Peter until he responded. That is what Jesus is doing to the chosen people. This is how Jesus is reaching out to the children of God.

Every day by day, every moment by moment, these nudges are happening to me; and to you, I believe. We are gently encouraged to attend Jesus' invitation with thorough discernment. To those who responded to the small voice with a fearful heart, Jesus is saying: "Do not be afraid, Simon." May you hear Jesus' voice while you act on his word, "Cast your net," and with throwing your net, may you live a natural, voluntary, and, therefore, faithful spiritual freedom without being trapped under the net of life.