

Luke 5:1-11

5Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He 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. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “**Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.**” ⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So 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. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and 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.” ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, **they left everything and followed him.**

Sermon – Sunday, February 6, 2022 – Epiphany 5

“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

We’ve all had to ‘put out into the deep’ haven’t we? Times in our lives when we’ve faced the unknown. It seems it is part of living. Our Lord asks it of Simon.

What is revealed to us about our Lord in today’s Gospel? He invites Simon to put out into the deep water to catch fish. We are still in the season of Epiphany, season of showings, season of revelations. Jesus is revealing to the world, to us, who God is.

Jesus knows without Simon saying that he had not caught any fish. He knows they need to catch fish, for that is their livelihood. Jesus knows our needs as well without our saying anything.

Jesus asks Simon to do something that makes little sense to him – to go fishing in the deep water in broad daylight. They normally fished at night in the shallow waters. But Simon is willing to lay his reservations aside. He doesn’t ‘get it’ but he does it and we know what happens. He has an overwhelming catch. They have to get the second boat. Their nets are so full they are ready to break.

Let me tell you about someone who launched out into the deep. Her name was Emma Gatewood. I have just finished reading a book about her titled ‘Grandma Gatewood’s Walk’. At the age of 67, in 1955, she ‘went for a walk’ as she put it. It was a walk of more than 2,000 mile along the Appalachian Trail ending at the summit of Mt Katahdan in Maine. She bought a yard of denim and sewed herself a tube shaped bag. In it she put band aids, boullion cubes, peanuts and raisins, clothes and a blanket. She carried it on her shoulder. She had no fancy hiking gear, not even a tent. But a few years before she had read an article in the National Geographic about the Appalachian Trail. It painted an inviting picture. It said there were shelters built at frequent intervals along the way. She was strong and had worked hard all her life, but her feet were misshapen from bunions. All she could wear to walk were canvas tennis shoes. She would wear out at least 7 pairs in the 6 months it took her to complete the trail. She wore glasses and was practically blind without them when she broke them more than once. Many nights she slept outside on a bed of leaves. Sometimes she heated flat stones which she slept on for warmth.

Grandma Gatewood was asked many times by reporters why she was walking the trail. She gave different off the cuff answers. She said she did it for a lark. Another time she said she did it because she wanted to. She really was deeply driven to walk the trail because less than two years later, she walked it again! Despite the dangers, rattlesnakes, rocky ledges, swollen streams that almost swept her away, she faced the challenge again and many others.

Grandma Gatewood became a folk icon. She brought attention to both the beauty of the Appalachian Trail and the need to improve sections. She inspired many to follow her when walking was not in vogue and cars were increasing by leaps and bounds. On TrailJournals.com, many entries even now encourage others with the slogan 'Remember Grandma Gatewood'. She lacked most of the pieces of equipment that hikers consider absolutely essential, but she possessed that one ingredient, desire. She made the thru-hike achievable. It didn't take fancy guidebooks, training, or youthfulness. It took putting one foot in front of the other five million times. Grandma Gatewood could not have known the effect her walks would have. She could barely explain why she chose to do it. But she had an inner sense which told her to take the risk and it paid off.

Scott Hoeze writes: "It all begins when Jesus comes to us in the middle of our lives, where we work, where we live, the seaside, the classroom, the hospital, the office, the kitchen, and asks us to trust him enough to do one strange little thing, like fishing in the deep water in broad daylight. It's the kind of thing that's a little weird, a bit outside your usual routine. It's the sort of request that demands trust because you wouldn't normally do it."

The other thing about Jesus' strange request is that it came at a point of failure and vulnerability. "All night long, and nothing." Says Simon. ...It speaks of the feelings we often have of futility, discouragement, and boredom. "All night long and nothing."

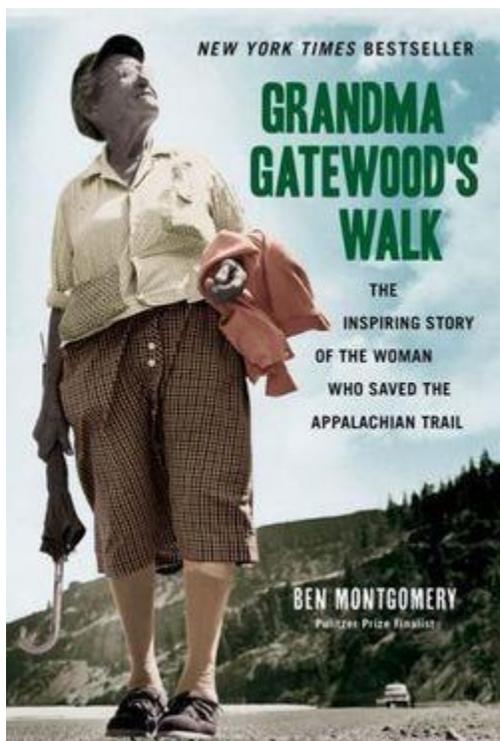
Often Jesus' call comes to us: when we least expect it; when we've failed, when we feel in over our heads; when we feel uncomfortable and confused; when we feel like the proverbial fish out of water. It's in our places of vulnerability, confusion and failure that we are more receptive. He can reach us in the deep water in broad daylight where we feel a little silly and strange.

Our Lord IS there with us in the deep and murky waters, always inviting us to our potential, inviting us to trust that he is present in these crazy notions we don't

entirely understand. I remember trying to decide whether to leave my parish in Quebec. I had not been there very long. There seemed many reasons why I ‘should’ stay, but I had such a yearning to come back ‘home’ to New Brunswick. Once decided, I found I could navigate those deep waters and the benefits I could not have predicted. I couldn’t wait to get away, wanting to leave before the movers had loaded our possessions onto the moving van! As we crossed into New Brunswick, there was such a feeling of relief! The return, although unexpected, worked out well. One benefit was that my mom and I had time together during her last few years of life.

Another launching into the deep, our friends who despite declaring they were too old to rear their grandchildren, did in fact rise to that challenge. There are many of you who have gone into deep waters during the last two years in this Covid pandemic. Queen Elizabeth celebrates today 70 years since she ascended the throne. Surely that was launching out into the deep for such a young woman.

‘Do not be afraid.’ Are our lord’s parting words. Even in the deep water, he is with us and promises abundance. Amen.





We need to forget about the illustrations from those well-meaning children's Bibles some of us grew up with. In those pictures the disciples tended to be pretty handsome with well-groomed beards, sporting robes worthy of the crown prince of Saudi Arabia. In such depictions the disciples were always clean and remarkably Anglo-Saxon looking. The fashions may have changed over time, but in an era when tunics and robes were what people wore, we often visualize the disciples wearing the ancient equivalent of Armani designer suits. Probably, though, they were far more common and ragged looking.

That's why, if magically you could see the disciples, their demeanor, speech, and appearance would not make it easier to believe the gospel but just possibly tougher to swallow. Can it really be that this rag-tag group of uneducated fishermen were in touch with the deepest truth and dearest secret of the universe?

Fairy tales are stories of transformation, and that's what happened to these simple people we call the disciples. If you took the disciples and brought them all together into one room, you would never in your wildest imagination guess by looking at them that this weak-looking pack of ordinary folks could change the world. But they did. The disciples changed the world because it was to them that the secret of the universe was first revealed.

That's why Jesus called them in the first place. If you're going to save the world, you've got to start somewhere. And if in the end you're going to save the world through humility, gentleness, compassion, and sacrifice, it makes sense to begin with a

The disciples needed to be common, ordinary, and above all humble if they were going to do Jesus any good and so change the world. Still, Jesus did need them and that's why he called them. But in the calling process, there was more going on than we realize.

First, commentators point out that in Luke 5:1, this is the first time in Luke that we read the phrase “logon tou theou” or “word of God.” Here we have an early indication that what came out of Jesus’ mouth were not merely his own words but no less than the very word of God, a revelation that bore the imprimatur of God’s truth. It’s easy to let a phrase like that slide right on by when reading this passage, but it packs a wallop and may well be worthy of pointing out in a sermon.

Second, it is probably not necessary to point this out, but in Luke 5:10, the Greek word that refers to that of which the disciples would not become fishers is *anthropos*, referring not to “men” with its male connotations but to “humanity” more broadly.

It all begins when Jesus comes to us in the middle of our lives, where we work, where we live, the seaside, the classroom, the hospital, the office, the kitchen, and asks us to trust him enough to do one strange little thing, like fishing in the deep water in broad daylight. It’s the kind of thing that’s a little weird, a bit outside your usual routine. It’s the sort of request that demands trust because you wouldn’t normally do it. It’s like when a friend of mine asked me to attend a weekend retreat called De Colores, and then wouldn’t tell me very much about it. Or, it’s like the lawyer who just felt that a colleague was hungry for spiritual life and dared to open up a conversation over coffee by asking, “How do you feel about God?” Or, it’s like the woman who saw an ad in the paper about an opportunity to tutor illiterate adults and picked up the phone. A little odd; not anticipated, unplanned. That’s the way Jesus’ call often comes. Christ invades our everyday lives with one of these little offbeat impulses, these strange biddings. We have the feeling they are coming from him, though we’re not at all sure. And a lot hangs on what we do with them. What if Peter had ignored Jesus’ strange suggestion?

I knew a woman who, for some very good reasons, was very insecure around men, and particularly around ministers. Yet, she had always had a deep fascination with God and a ravenous hunger to know more about God. One day, as we were talking, she was complaining about the fact that her life had no direction, she didn’t know what to do with her life. Her children were all in school. She was stuck in a dead-end job for which she was over-qualified. Now what? She was scared, hurt, and angry. She had been fishing “all night long, and nothing.” Off hand, almost jokingly, I said “Ever think of the seminary?” We both laughed. “Are you kidding?” You know where she is today? She’s a minister. Still struggling with insecurities. Still wondering where it will all lead, she followed this voice inside that called her to throw her net in the deep water. I believe that Christ called her at precisely those most dangerous and vulnerable points of her life. That’s where he calls disciples.

Jesus invited Peter to fish in the deep water. That little phrase bristles with suggestive possibilities. God takes the highest view of our potential. He doesn’t want us to be paddling around in the shallows of life where we often spend so much of our time. I remember swimming with my Dad. He was always insisting that I go with him into the deep water, while I clung to the sandy beach. Finally I did it, and I found the joy and freedom of swimming in the deep water. I think Jesus is constantly inviting us into the deep places. He’s calling us to acts of trust and courage, while we want to play it safe. He’s calling us to step out in faith and freedom while we

cling to our safe and familiar fears and anxieties. He's calling us to think and live deeply, to face our doubts and fears, and abandon ourselves to the depths of God's abundant life.