

5th Sunday after Epiphany C 06 February 2022

Luke 5:1-11

St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth

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Grace, peace, faith, hope, and love to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

[Jesus] said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them . . . Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Let's pray...

It has been a long night for Simon. He's done everything a professional fisherman is supposed to do, just as he's been taught. He's been plying his trade like this for years; night after night, week after week, season after season. But tonight is different. The usual routine didn't work this time. The nets are empty. Simon caught nothing. Not one fish.

I know that feeling well. I remember times when I've checked the tides, the weather, the phase of the moon, the location, caught fresh bait with my cast net, fished all night around good structures, like my father and grandfathers taught me, and I didn't even get a bite. I've gone home empty-handed and sunken-hearted.

Now, I know you've had times and disappointments like this, too. Times when you've done everything right, everything you were taught to do, given it your best, did all you could, said your prayers, lived faithfully, worked hard. You've done everything imaginable and yet, your nets still came up empty and you were left entangled in disappointment, doubt, sadness, grief, anger, fear, confusion.

The 2010 floods in Queensland marked the end of a nineteen-year drought for many farmers and graziers. Sadly, the water came too late for some who had no choice but to sell their properties. But it's not easy to walk away from life on the land. Tough, hardworking families suddenly lose their sense of identity and they no longer know what to do with themselves. Their nets are empty. I've walked alongside people struggling with pain, disappointment, and violence in their marriages. More empty nets. The death of a loved one always seems to leave the nets of our life empty. Empty nets aren't, however, the final reality for us.

The antidote for empty nets is deep water. "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch," Jesus says. But frustration, fatigue, and despair sometimes leave us paralysed on the shore. Sometimes it seems there's nothing to do but to sit on the shore and stare in bewilderment at our empty nets; nets that remind us of what we didn't catch, symbols of the one that got away and what we've lost. Simon protests, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." First, Simon does what we all do. He protests. But protest eventually turns to resignation. The resignation of one who has nowhere else to go and nothing else to do.

Though Luke writes about a lake, boats, nets, and fishermen this story is about more than fishing. We need to untangle the fishing analogy to discover the teaching, the blessing, and the promise it contains. This is a story of life and transformation, first for Simon, but also for us. Jesus calls Simon to a new life, a new way of being. This happens in the context of fishing because that's what Simon knows best. Simon is a professional fisherman. Jesus comes to us in the ordinary everyday circumstances of our lives. Whether we are fishermen or land lubbers Jesus asks us to set out into the deep water and let down our nets for a catch.

But there's a snag. As I've said to you before, there's something about depth that is frightening. Deep water is risky. You can't touch the bottom. You're in over your head. You can't see the bottom or what might be lurking down there. People drown in deep water. And that's the point. The deep is the place where we both drown and swim. It's the place where we are buried with Christ and raised with Christ. It's where we experience the fullness of our baptism, the fullness of divine life.

Too often, however, we're content to stay in shallow water. It's safe, comfortable, and familiar. If it gets too scary, we just step out. But shallow water is the place of empty nets. The deep is exactly where we must go. It's what we need, it's what the world needs, and it's where our wild, untamed Jesus is.

The world doesn't need smarter people, harder working people, or more beautiful people. The world needs deep people. People of depth who are willing to be transformed; people willing to go to the deep end, to get in over their head, to reach where they can't see, to stand where they can't touch the bottom, to trust beyond their understanding and fear.

This is something I've learnt from observing my son; from watching him when he swims in the surf. He seems to love going in over his head. He swims way off the beach in the deep water and revels in it. He lolls about in perfect harmony with his surroundings. He exudes a fearlessness; a confidence; a peace that I admire. And he projects the same gentle, yet unyielding confidence particularly when he's challenged about his faith and Christianity by his mates. That's the place to which the gospel invites us today.

Every day that we put out into deep water becomes a new day, a day of creation. For just as in the beginning "the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2) so today the Son of God and Simon are moving upon the face of the water. A new creation is about to take place. Jesus will take Simon deep water fishing. He will re-create, resurrect, Simon and his life. He will teach Simon a new way of fishing and show him a new place to catch fish. Jesus will give Simon a new use for his empty nets.

The empty nets of Simon's life will be lowered into the depths of divine love and Simon Peter will haul up divine abundance, a bounty of life. The catch he makes will consist of a great haul of Jesus' life affirming gifts – faith, hope, love, compassion, wisdom, mercy, forgiveness, peace, healing, and a vision for the future. The deep is always the place of sacred transformation, a place of new life and abundance beyond counting. I'll leave it to you to make the obvious baptismal connections.

There's one more thing that's critical to emphasise about the deep places. When Jesus took Simon deep water fishing, he didn't say, "Let down your nets and see if there's anything here." He said, "Let down your nets for a catch." You see, in the deep water the catch is always guaranteed.

What and how much we catch depends upon the gear we use and with whom we go fishing. I recommend using God's word as "the crowd was pressing in on him to hear" (Luke 5:1), soaked in a brine of Christ's life-affirming grace, and don't even think about setting sail without the captain on deck; Jesus. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.