

Luke 5: 1- 11 – Derek Yap

This passage from Luke seems so familiar to me, I guess because I've read it and heard it so many times. Let me summarize quickly. Jesus comes to the shore of the The Lake of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee, and there are so many people there to listen that he asks to go out on one of two boats nearby. After teaching the crowd, he then tells Simon to go out to deep water and let down the nets, even though Simon and his fellow fishers have washed their nets after working all night and got nothing.

Nonetheless, he complies and a miracle happens – the nets become so full of fish he calls on James and John in the other boat for help. Simon now begs forgiveness and Jesus says “Don't be afraid, for now you'll be catching people”. And when they return to the shore, they leave everything behind and follow Jesus.

I realized this week I got so caught up in the feeling that I recognized and knew this story, that I was so familiar with the story, that I've never spent any time really thinking about the story and what the passage might have to say. So even though it's been difficult to prepare something to say, I have to admit that I'm grateful I had a chance to host this text and, as Bev encouraged me, “to break open the Word”.

Jesus is at the centre of the story here. He comes to the lakeshore where people are eager to listen to the Word of God, goes out in the boat to teach, performs a miracle, proclaims to the fishers what they will be doing from now on, and they follow him. Jesus calls, and they answer. How does this happen?

At the beginning of the story, you get the sense of the people's eagerness. The crowd is described as “pressing in on him”, and Jesus resorts to going out onto the water in a boat so he can teach from there.

Already the teachings of Jesus are getting a lot of attention at the beginning of his ministry. And it's at this point in the narrative where Simon, the first disciple, gets involved. Notice here that Jesus is leading the conversation – he asks Simon to take the boat out into the water, and he asks Simon to go out into deeper water and cast the nets again.

Simon is just minding his own business up until now – caring for his nets after a hard night where he caught nothing. And then Jesus appears, asking to use his boat and then giving him advice on how to fish. I don't know about you, but if someone came by my desk and asked to use my computer and then told me how I should be doing my job, I would probably complain.

Simon also complains, but he also recognizes Jesus authority, saying Master. Last time when Jesus came to his house, Simon's mother-in-law was healed through the power of Jesus' words. Knowing this he complies and lets down the net.

And again something miraculous happens. The net begins to break with the weight of all the fish being caught. And then, after getting help, the boats start to sink. This is a turning point for Simon, who now, as Simon Peter, falls to his knees and cries out for

Jesus to leave him saying “I am a sinful man” – “I have missed the mark” in his surprise and wonder at what has happened. But Jesus forgives him, commissioning him to catch people before they return to shore. And then the story ends abruptly with Simon, James and John leaving their nets behind to follow Jesus.

This story ends so quickly that I think it moves us to personally reflect on this series of events.

How does the Word speak to us? Are we there on the lakeshore, pressing in with eagerness, or are we away in the distance, washing our nets? It’s comforting to know that Jesus reaches us where we are at, through words and through actions. And I find it especially interesting that Jesus prompts and pushes through resistance on his way to call his first disciple. Simon, unlike the crowd on the shore, does not seem to present himself as being very eager.

How does Jesus break into our routines and suggest a different way of doing things? The passage seems to ask us to acknowledge the authority of Jesus, our teacher, and to heed His requests.

How do these come to us in our time and space? Like in this story, a starting place might be reflecting on places of abundance in our own lives, wherever those may be. As Jesus asked Simon to move out to deeper water, we might reflect on how our journey with Jesus deepens our experiences.

How have we missed the mark? Here’s a challenge, just in time for Lent. How can we respond to the gift of God’s love and Jesus’ call to us using the gifts we’ve been given? It’s not always easy to respond to the prompting of Jesus when it interrupts the routines that we’ve built up in our lives.

How is Jesus abundant love for us made real? I can tell you that every time I come to this place I see this love come alive in the warm smiles, helping hands and open hearts. Just as Simon asked the brothers to help him with the overfilled nets, I feel that there is an enormous amount of support and care in this place.

And how do we follow? How do we put our nets away? I think we can start by listening to our hearts and responding to the great gift of God’s love made real through Jesus, and through acts of loving kindness to each other. May the light of Jesus light you down the path that you are journeying on. Amen.