

Today's story of Jesus calling the disciples is different.
In the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark,
Jesus stands on the shore and compels the disciples to
follow him.

In today's Gospel, Jesus goes fishing;
Jesus gets into Simon Peter's boat.

I want you to remember that Jesus knows Simon Peter:
he has been to his house, healed his mother-in-law,
eaten with him.

They may not have a relationship, but they have shared a
meal.

Jesus does not wait for Simon Peter to come to him.
Jesus goes to the shore, climbs into Peter's boat,
and speaks to him.

I can imagine the crowd standing along the shore.

I can see the fishermen cleaning their nets.

I can imagine Simon Peter listening.

The teaching, though, is not the point.

We have no idea

what stories or sayings Jesus has

for these fishermen and their community.

Instead, it's what happens next that matters:

Jesus invites Simon Peter to keep fishing.

Simon Peter is skeptical (I expect him to be)
and listens anyway
(Also expected. Peter is obedient even when he's
uncertain.)

They cast their nets in the deep water and their catch
is exceptional, dangerously abundant.
Simon Peter's obedience changes his life.
He falls down on his knees in humility.
He leaves everything to follow Jesus.

I don't think the word *everything* is hyperbolic.
Simon Peter has a mother-in-law,
usually a spouse comes with one of those.
And imagine the wealth Peter leaves behind:
all those fish.
Something happens here that transforms his life,
compelling him to follow Jesus.

Whenever one of the Gospels gives us a different version
of a story, I wonder why.
What meaning does this story have for the community?

Some say the Gospel of Luke was written 40 years after
Jesus' death and resurrection; some say 70 years.
Either way, that's a long time, generations have passed.
During those years, the first followers of Jesus actively
anticipated his return.
They expected the apocalypse, God's reign on earth,
to happen right now, in their lifetime.
Except, it never does,
at least not in the way they expected.

I wonder how it felt for them:
the unmet expectation of Jesus' imminent return.

Simon Peter was a leader of those early followers.
With all his doubts and limitations,
his ministry was foundational to them.
His voice, in many ways, gives voice to the people:
the other disciples, his community, the early church,
us.
His confession, doubts,
and redemption
resemble our own.

My favorite part of today's story is Peter's honesty.
Jesus tells Peter to put the boat out into the deep water,
to keep fishing,
and Peter tells the truth:
"Master, we have worked ALL NIGHT and caught
NOTHING."

This is what I hear: *Are you sure? We are experienced
fishermen and we failed. Do you really think you can do
better than us? Ok. Your choice. Whatever you say...*

No matter what he really means,
Peter's truth telling endears him to me.
I can relate to an apostle
who is not afraid to ask questions or speak his mind.

Imagine hearing Peter tell this story after Jesus'
resurrection.
He tells the whole story, how he questioned Jesus;
how the boats almost sank;
how he fell on his knees.
This moment changed Peter's life.
And not just his life:
the life of his family, friends, and community.
This is the moment when Simon Peter knew Jesus was
The One.

How did Peter know?

There are two important details in this story:
deep water and wild abundance.

The phrase *deep water* appears several times in the Greek translation of the Septuagint (Gk translation of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings).

It refers to God's control over chaos.

Whenever Jesus acts over and in water,
he reveals his divine nature.

The incredible catch of fish exposes who Jesus is.

And, what about that impossible catch?

Sounds like a fisherman's tale.

There were so many fish our boat almost sank.

Also sounds treacherous.

The story does hint, though, at other dangers.

Can we imagine the value of such a great catch?

I bet the tax collectors are watching.

What about the risk of exposing who Jesus is to the crowd?

I bet the authorities are curious about Peter's behavior.

There are more moments like this to come:
feeding the 5000 with a few loaves of bread,
sitting in the courtyard during Jesus' arrest.

Yet, at the heart of the story is a promise:

God's abundant presence in their lives,
actively working on their behalf.

What does it mean to leave everything and follow Jesus?

The disciples leave that huge catch of fish.

That seems like a big deal.

Imagine the security and wealth that would come from such a haul.

I wonder if I would leave those fish,
leave those crowds, leave my life.

Imagine hearing this story 40-70 years after Jesus' resurrection.

Simon Peter is probably dead,
likely martyred for his faith.

The dangers of discipleship are very real,
more than sinking boats from lots of fish.

To what end?

Jesus has not returned;
the kingdom of God does not reign.

And then, someone says:

remember the first time Jesus went fishing with Peter.

Remember the look Peter gave Jesus when he said *put out into the deep water.*

Remember all those fish; we ate off those for days.

Remember how Peter, James, and John left with Jesus that same day.

Perhaps this story gave them hope to keep being church,
to keep spreading the Gospel.

This story gives me hope.
I am weary of our current circumstances.
In almost two full decades of ministry,
I never imagined missing an Annual Meeting.
For years, I ignored practical theologians who told us to
get our churches on the internet.
Now, I find myself praying the internet works so we can
livestream.
Everything seems hard.
And still, Jesus says,
“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets.”

And Simon does it.
Despite his hesitancy, his reasons to not listen,
they go fishing anyway.
And it changes his whole life.
He leaves it all behind for one reason:
because Jesus showed up in his boat.

Surely, Jesus is here, in the midst of my chaos.
I’m willing to trust that God is still God,
present and active in our circumstances.
I believe that following Jesus will transform our chaos,
drawing us closer to God’s kin_dom.

To be clear: following Jesus is not cheap.
It is more than Sunday morning.
Jesus meets us here, and in our homes, and at our work;

and then, invites us into deep water,
into the chaos of our circumstance and our world.

When we glimpse Jesus in our midst, be assured,
He is doing something

...and it will change our lives.

I considered listing here all the ways Jesus wants to
transform us.
I cannot list all the ways, there are too many.
I know that Jesus is working a reckoning in my own life:
to let go of control,
that mercy is ever present,
that love is always worth the risk.

I may try to avoid Jesus' ways of abundant, persistent
faith and mercy.
And again and again, Jesus invites me to pay attention
and keep trying.
God is working in our midst.
To be witnesses,
we must be ready
to leave ourselves behind and follow him,
no matter the cost.

May God grant us the courage and will to do so.