

“Called to Follow”

Luke 5:1-11

The first three weekends in November are our annual “Stewardship Emphasis” with this year’s theme “Called and Sent.” This weekend’s theme is “Called to Follow,” next weekends is “Challenged to Grow” and on the third weekend Pastor Uhle will be here with all of his wisdom and experience to talk about “Sent to Serve” when we will bring our commitment cards forward as well as our annual “Women’s Thankoffering.” Today we begin with how we are all “Called to Follow.”

When we think about stewardship we tend to think about giving to God those things that are under our control and are, therefore, ours to give; the traditional trinity of time, talent, and treasure. Rather I’d like for us to try to think of ourselves as stewards of something most definitely not under our control: “The depths, the deep waters,” the chaos and uncertainty that churn in everyone’s life.

Some of us may feel like we stray into the out of control depths only now and then, occasionally and usually by mistake or uncontrollable circumstances. When we unexpectedly and suddenly find ourselves in a hospital bed as many of us did this past summer, or facing unemployment, or foreclosure, or bankruptcy, or family conflict; it seems we’re spending most of our days struggling to stay afloat. But often it’s in the midst of chaos that Jesus finds us and calls us to follow.

Jesus was again in the midst of chaos himself when “standing beside the lake and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the Word of God.” People had already

experienced his gift of healing and now pressed in to hear every word that came out of his mouth.

Seeing two empty boats on the shore with the fishermen busily washing their nets, Jesus suddenly climbs into one of the boats that happened to belong to Simon. He tells him, “to put out a little way from shore” where Jesus sits down and teaches the crowds from the boat. Jesus brings “calm” to the “pressing in” of the crowd.

In the same way, following Jesus sometimes means separating ourselves from the chaos for awhile in order to be still and hear the Word of God. When we are in the chaos, in the crowd, in the “pressing in” of our everyday lives of running the race – we can forget to separate ourselves even for one hour on Saturday night or Sunday morning to hear the Word of God. Or we know someone, probably someone close to us, who is caught up in crowds and who needs you to invite them to separate themselves to be still and hear the Word of God.

I know and understand that many of you and probably most of you feel threatened by the prospect of inviting a friend, neighbor, co-worker, or even a family member to come and worship with you.

Even when we know a person’s life is in chaos and that separating themselves from that chaos for an hour or two to hear God’s Word could only help them, we still fear rejection, we still may feel “awkward” or “foolish” discussing our faith “out there” in the chaos. And yet we know in our hearts that when we accept Jesus calling us to extend an invitation to someone to worship with us – we trust the Holy Spirit has already gone ahead

of us and is already at work in the invited person's life. Even when we're rejected, we've responded to our calling to follow Jesus and a door has been opened.

In our gospel text, we learn that being still and hearing God's Word is just the beginning. Verse 4: "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.'"

Jesus directs Peter to go out to the "deep water," go out to the depths, go out to the treacherous waters, go out to the Redeemer Crises Center, go out to the Parma Heights Food Pantry or our own food pantry, go out to the teenage mother, go out to the widow and widower all alone, go out to the hospital and nursing home, go out to the prodigal sons and daughters, go out into the chaos, go out into the depths, go out into the treacherous waters and "let down your nets for a catch."

Jesus promises the fishermen a blessing, "a catch." "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." I think Jesus is saying that if we follow him out of here into the chaos of life, into the deep waters – it is there that we choose to either see ourselves as completely helpless or we can choose to see ourselves as followers of Jesus, as stewards – even of those deep places.

The depths, the chaos that we find ourselves in this week and next are not always our fault, nor has God somehow caused them in order to "test us." Rather, circumstances where we are most vulnerable can become opportunities that we entrust to Jesus, trusting that someday he will bring blessing out of them. The God we know in Jesus Christ is not afraid of even the depths we find most frightening. Our God is more than capable of using

the deep waters as a place of revelation, as a place of vision, if we are willing to meet God there. When John was exiled to the island of Patmos, it was there in the deep waters that God met him and gave him revelation.

So when we answer Jesus' call to the deep places, we become stewards of those deep places. Following Jesus' call to the depths becomes a discipline of stewardship of all that God has blessed us with – even and especially stewards of the deep places, the grieving places, the dark places, the revelation places.

Yet we're hesitant. Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." I've been working hard in the deep places but with no results. I should probably just give up and retreat from the chaos to the safety of my cocoon. "Yet if you say so, I'll let down the nets."

Surprise! Revelation! Blessing! After so much chaos, after so much deep water, suddenly, when we least expect it, the nets are full. And we signal for our friends to come and help us with the catch.

Peter's response to this blessing and revelation is to finally recognize God's presence with him in the deep waters and to confess his unworthiness. He fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

God knows we're sinful and yet reveals himself to us and blesses us anyway. But then he challenges us by calling us to continue to follow him into the depths. "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." "When they had brought their boats ashore, they left everything and followed him."

The picture on the front of the bulletin (up on the screen) helps us remember that he never expects us to face the deep waters alone. He is there, at the center of things, extending his arms to us in blessing.

Notice his disciples are in physical contact with one another. The disciple on the far left has placed his hands on the shoulder of the disciple next to him. The disciple on the far right is holding the hand of the disciple next to him. Jesus calls those who follow him to venture not only into their own depths, but also into the depths of their sisters and brothers. Our hands can be the ones through which somebody else feels Christ taking hold of them.

Also notice that none of the people in the picture appear to be looking directly at Jesus. Three of the disciples are looking toward the sky while the fourth is waving to the fisherman who remains with the boats. In the same way, we never directly “see” Jesus, but know and feel his presence all around and in us when we receive his body and blood in Holy Communion or when we give or receive an act of kindness or a word of grace. Today we draw near to him in faith when he makes Cameron and Jeffrey his own children in holy baptism and we worship him in thanksgiving.

The boat masts form crosses reminding us of Jesus’ descent into the depths to save us from making that same descent. The crosses are empty because of his victory over those depths for us.

Finally, the seagulls can remind us of the Holy Spirit. Seven birds to remind us of the seven gifts of the Spirit – Wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety,

and the fear of the Lord from Isaiah 11:2.

Challenged to follow. Called to follow. Jesus calls us to go into the deep water not only as individuals but as a church, as a community of faith. What is the “deep” to which we have been unwilling to go? What blessings might we experience and bring to others if we have faith to follow him there?

May the peace of God . . .

#756 - Eternal Father, Strong to Save

#817 - You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore (Contemporary)