

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

February 10, 2019  
The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11  
Isaiah 6:1-8  
Psalm 138  
I Corinthians 15:1-11

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When I was a little girl, I loved to fish. I used a red & white bobber and a simple rod and reel. I would put a worm on the hook but I always hated doing that part. The worms were messy and gross. I was often alone when I fished – my parents worked long hours and so I had to find ways to entertain myself and fishing was one of my favorite outlets.

Clearly, I wasn't going to catch anything big. The hooks I used were barely big enough to hold to anything larger than a brim. But that didn't matter so much to me. I simply loved the process. I would walk down to the dock near my house and sit down on those old wooden boards, drop my hook in and wait patiently. I loved to watch the fish start to swim around. They were always curious, although a little tentative. They would circle around a time or two. Some would gently come up to nibble on the worm. But there was always that one bold fish who swam up and took a big gulp. The bobber would shoot down. I would jump up, give the rod a quick yank and reel in my catch.

And there on that old wooden dock, I would glory over the brim on the end of the line. I would run my hand down it's scales and hold it gently so I could remove the hook. Then I would place it carefully back in the water and watch it swim away. And so would go my afternoon...fish after fish.

I couldn't help but think of those long afternoons on the dock when I read our Gospel text for today. Because if you have ever picked up a rod and reel you know that the act of fishing requires a number of qualities – things like good timing, thoughtful preparation, a dose of humility, and lot of patience.

But there is something else it requires. To be successful, to fully appreciate the act of fishing one must find joy in the process. Otherwise, when the hours get long and the fish aren't biting you will be quick to give up and go back home. But when you love what you do...the long hours and the waiting become life-giving.

And that live-giving process is where we find Simon Peter. It's been a long day on the water fishing with no results to show for his hard work. He is tired. Ready to go home. Busy cleaning his nets to close out the day. Then, Jesus comes up on the scene and gets into one of the boats. He asks Simon Peter to take him out to deep water and then he tells Simon Peter to put his nets back out.

I doubt this was a welcome request at this point in the day. I imagine it coming with some hesitation. Simon Peter was surely exhausted from his day's work. And so, he begins to argue with Jesus that he had already been out all night with no luck. But for some reason he gives in.

Maybe it was curiosity. Maybe it was faithfulness. We don't know. But, we do know that he does what Jesus requests. Simon Peter begins to trust that maybe, just maybe there is something to this thing that Jesus wants him to do. And he begins the routine he knows so well...throwing out the nets, watching them descend into the water.

And, then he waits. And if you know anything about fishing you know he is waiting for an unknown outcome. I love this unspoken detail in the story because it reminds us that Simon Peter had to say yes to Jesus without knowing the results of his actions. He had to commit to follow before he knew the outcome. He had to trust that what Jesus requested of him would be life-giving.

And somewhere in between the work and the results, Simon Peter finds God - In the life-giving joy that comes from trusting and following. Simon Peter could have never imagined this moment of abundance. An abundance he had never experienced before. He had been going through the same motions day after day and month after month. Yet, on this particular day his routine changed. It changed because he got in the boat with Jesus.

Think about this shift in Simon Peter's faith. The moment when Jesus called and he listened. All of the sudden, his efforts become productive and they are not just productive but they are abundant.

Today, is our Annual Meeting and I can think of no better text to frame our day than this. Because in many way, Simon Peter represents all of us, our church, our community of faith. It reminds us that like Simon Peter we are each called to get in the boat and follow Jesus...and do some fishing along the way.

It makes me reflect on what it means to be a church that truly loves the process of being faithful followers of Christ. To consider what that means for us, let's go back to the qualities of being an effective fisherman. Good timing, thoughtful preparation, a dose of humility, and lot of patience.

- 1) Good Timing...that simply means that has a congregation we have to listen closely to how God is calling us to love and serve the Lord in our church and in our community. We must build our work on prayer and discernment – strengthening our spiritual foundation and opening our hearts and minds.
- 2) Thoughtful Preparation – We have to look at our spiritual gifts and individually consider how God is calling us to get in the boat. What do you and I have to offer to the foundation of this church? Jesus wants each of us to cultivate our gifts so that we are ready to apply them when the time is right.
- 3) A Dose of Humility – To me, this is critical for any church to grasp. A church that wants to grow will come up with all kinds of ways to do just that – outreach, programs, bible study, worship services...and then they don't see the numbers they had hoped for.

That's where humility comes in. Faith doesn't call us to be discouraged but to keep coming back time and time again. Don't get too caught up in the external trappings of success. Get caught up in the simple act of serving because it's what God wants you to do.

- 4) Patience – This can be tricky but when we working to build the body of Christ we can't get frustrated or tired. We must trust in God's timing – even when we can't see the outcome just yet.
- 5) Joy – This is the most important thing I will leave you with. You have to find joy in serving. Plain and simple. You do it because you love God and want to serve God because it is life-giving. And when you keep joy at the center you find that the timing, the preparation, the humility and the patience are all things that build your faith beyond what you could have ever imagined. And it will build the church.

Mother Teresa once said, "Stay here, right where you are, and love the people God has given you to love. *Care for people right where you are.*" That's joy. Loving who we are and what we are. Caring for those whom God has given us to care for and letting our joy shine forth for others to witness.

We are so blessed to be here together. Let us take our joy into ever deeper faithful service of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.