

## **Taking the Plunge**

The Call of Peter (and us)

Luke 5:1-11

### **Slide: Fishing Net**

Take a moment and recall a time when you took a risk to do something. It need not be a big risk but maybe it is. Maybe you decided to buy a new home despite the fact that you were quite used to the one you were in and it was an untold amount of work to leave it, but you needed to do it. Maybe you decided to take some classes or try out a new profession. Maybe you weren't certain about retirement and if you had the funds to do so. Maybe you couldn't decide upon a college or what to begin studying in college, whether to take a gap year or volunteer. Were you risking a new relationship after being hurt? Or perhaps you finally decided to eat at a restaurant indoors for the first time since COVID hit our world.

Whatever the risk was, great or small go through the decision making in your mind for just a moment. How did you feel about the decision?

Was it easy? Was it agonizing? Were you anxious or excited? Did you have confidence in yourself making that decision or did you ask others to help you discern? Was it an out of the blue risk that you tried or a slow, methodical decision?

Now, take another moment to reflect upon how that risk went. How do you look back at that risk taking? Did it go well? Do you regret it? Either way, risk taking is not an easy thing. It can often be the easier thing to do nothing and in the Gospel of Luke, in Peter's case, to catch the same fish – or no fish at all.

This is where we meet Peter. He isn't indifferent to Jesus at all at the start of this story in Luke. In fact, in the chapter before, Jesus heals Peter's Mother-in-law. You would think that such a miracle alone would move Peter to take the risk and join Jesus on a discipleship journey. And yet, Peter has not taken that risk yet. Instead, he does what he thought he was called to do. He, as a fisherman does, goes fishing all night, and when he catches nothing, he comes back

in to mend his nets and lets Jesus borrow his boat to stand in – because, as I said before, he isn't indifferent to Jesus. He just hasn't decided to join him. In my opinion, while reading this very dramatic story from Luke, I think Peter deep down is afraid he isn't worthy to take the plunge and that risk may just be too great.

So, here we find Jesus teaching on the Sea of Galilee, the local Greek name being the lake of Gennesaret. And, true to Jesus' tendency, Jesus asks a Peter, likely with a gentle and loving agenda, to use his boat to teach in. Jesus is being pressed upon so much by the crowds there, that it is the only way by which he can be separated enough from them to teach all of them. So, he asks Peter for the use of his boat. As I read this story this week, I would anticipate that Jesus does this on purpose as he knows that Peter is interested. Peter is discerning. He isn't committed yet, but give it time.

Now, after teaching the crowds, Jesus notices that Peter along with other fisherman, are still cleaning and mending their

nets, because they were out all night long fishing.

Nighttime was the time to fish in the ancient world as it didn't spook the fish as much, there was less heat on the water, and they were more likely to sell their fish in the morning, as there was no way of keeping fish from going bad unless you had salt. Salt was extremely costly; therefore it behooved Peter to have his fish caught at night. So, imagine that Peter had fished all night, had caught nothing, and was tired and frustrated. Interesting that Jesus chooses this time to catch Peter in his discernment.

This is why I like this story! Unlike the grand "call" story we hear in Isaiah, where the throne of God is present and the Cherubim and Seraphim are flying around, and Isaiah shouts, "Here I am! Send me!" we have instead a very common, everyday scenario.

There is no burning bush like for Moses, no blinding light on the road to Damascus like Paul. Nope, Jesus simply tells

Peter that he needs to try to fish again, even though Peter has already tried to do that for hours upon hours!

And, the invitation Jesus extends to Peter is to “Go out into deep water, and there let down your nets.” Go into deep water? Ok, now in the ancient world, any time we hear “deep water”, we may also hear that as a metaphor, in that it has two meanings. The first meaning is simply that Peter needs to go to deeper water to get fish and an amazing miracle will happen to get him to respond to God.

But, the underlying meaning is that Peter is being asked to take extreme risk in following Jesus and accepting God’s call to do so. For, the word deep in Greek is “Bathos”. Bathos means not only deep, but it means chaos.

The double meaning of that word suggests that what Jesus is asking Peter to do is to risk going into the chaos, into a world he doesn’t know, understand, or maybe even want. Go to deeper water? Go to the chaos? Why would I

want to risk doing that, Peter might ask.

Now, you notice that Peter is really reluctant at first and I think he’s kind of testy. He’s tired, he’s tried, and isn’t he the fisherman anyway? What does Jesus get off thinking he can tell him what to do when Peter is the expert fisherman? Furthermore, when deciding to go back into the deep water, he is risking doing things a different way, to trust that Jesus isn’t just doing this for a joke or for some grandstanding.

In a sense, by risking to go to deep water, Peter is leaving the shallow places behind: You can push this analogy further - The shallow places of his work, shallow places in his relationships with others, to himself and ultimately to God. By leaving the shallows, Peter is going into the chaos and taking a risk. By doing so, Peter also ends up going deeper into trust with God and his life will never be the same again.

No doubt that is why Peter responded to Jesus by

saying something like, “Ok, I’ll do it if you say so.” It sounds to me sort of like a resigned statement or at least a moping statement, and we ourselves I think often apply the same attitude when having to do with our faith, as if it is too challenging or even often inconvenient to work on and to follow through with.

**Slide: Boat in water**

Like Peter, it’s a good way for us to resist God’s call. Perhaps we might think, “Oh, there’s no use for me to go into the deep water, Jesus. I have fished those waters already. I have tried to pray. I have tried to study the bible. I have tried to be a servant like you, Jesus. And, I have tried to live a life of faith. But, I come up empty every time, and I’m tired. I’m tired of trying to fish in the same waters and there was nothing there before, so why would there be now?” It’s also a metaphor of today’s church – the borders of faith are too hard to go out of, to risk, to try.

But, it’s also just another way of saying, “I’m not good enough, I’m not old enough,

I’m not young enough, I’m not faithful enough, I have tried everything only to find it doesn’t work, and I don’t want to risk it when I can just be comfortable in the shallows like I always have been.

Yet, that is just the place where Peter...and us...become models for discipleship. It happens the moment when Peter responds to the call of Jesus by saying, “Well, if you say so.” And, although it is reluctant, Peter goes...and so do we...out into deep water, taking the plunge, where we are surprised to find abundance.

But, it’s not the kind of abundance of stuff or riches. It’s not the abundance of resources or that perfect catch to which Jesus invites us. It’s the kind of abundance that shows Peter and us how amazing God’s grace and love really is. And it is an abundance of relationship with the Almighty God, despite the chaos and the deep water that may be frightening.

That’s why this story about Peter is so much more

wonderful than the drastic call stories we often hear in the bible. Because Jesus doesn't call Peter to be anything more than he already is, except that instead of fishing for fish, Peter will join the great throng of believers in fellowship. He will be catching faith for others, no different than what our confirmation mentors do, not different than what parents do for their children, and no different than those who join a ministry at St. John's do.

And, Jesus doesn't call Peter to be a Rabbi or teacher like him, he doesn't ask Peter to do what he does; Jesus calls Peter to live in the deep water of his life, to risk being faithful, and to keep trying even when he is tired, to mend his nets, get back in the boat, and continue to find the abundance of God every day.

So, it's time to take the plunge again. It's time to remind ourselves that the risk of discipleship leads to abundance. For, that's not unlike how God continues to call us in these times of fishing all night and constantly coming up empty. God calls us to take

what we already are and to make it productive in new ways for the sake of the Gospel. And, we need to. These waters are new in this COVID, polarized world. These waters are nebulous and uncertain and different. But, together and as individuals, we are still today called to risk the deep water, to take the plunge of faith, not only because we should, but also because it's rewards are far too abundant to miss.

Where is your deep water of faith today, dear friends of Christ? How is Christ calling you to the deep today? Amen.