

Sermon
Kirk of St James
Sunday February 9, 2025
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We all have moments in our lives that are pivotal, moments that change us, shape us, and affect us. Some are small or perhaps more lighthearted, for example, I did not realize that getting married was going to draw such a sharp divide in my life. The time before where, I was blissfully unaware of sports, and the time after where it is absolutely inescapable. Even if there is not a game on it is at the very least sports commentary about the game coming up or the game that just happened. It never ends! And some are more personal, I remember standing at the funeral home after dad died with the director who is a friend. And he said to me, “You know, there is life before my mom died, and life after.” And since then, I have come to understand that statement. In our personal lives we have experiences that for better or worse become markers in our lives for significant events or changes. There is life before and life after. These experiences are not limited to our personal lives, they can also be global. The assassination of JFK, 9/11, and the pandemic are examples of moments that are important in our collective memory.

In Luke, this morning we encounter a pivotal moment in the life of some of Jesus’ disciples—the moments before and after they heard the call of Jesus and how much it changes their lives. When we come to this narrative in Luke Jesus’ reputation has been spreading and large crowds of people are following him, hoping to hear the word of God. The launch of his ministry had gotten off to a rough start, just a few verses before when he first preaches in the synagogue, he was nearly driven off a cliff by an angry crowd. It is not until his miracles begin that word begins to spread in a positive way. Demons are driven out, the sick are

healed, including the mother-in-law of Simon, and people are anxious to hear and be healed. This where we pick up this morning, Jesus facing a large crowd of people alongside the lake of Gennesaret.

I cannot imagine the fisherman were overly pleased coming ashore after a long night of unsuccessfully fishing, trying to get their nets cleaned so they could go home and sleep, and being surrounded by a large and anxious crowd. I would imagine they were even less enthused when Jesus asked them to get back into the boat and take him out of the water so he could continue to teach. I wonder if Simon, after seeing Jesus heal his mother-in-law, felt either curious or obligated, in either case he likely thought it might cost him a couple extra hours of his day.

For Jesus, the request was remarkably clever. Biblical scholar N.T Wright explains that along the lakeshore of Capernaum, there is series of steep inlets, and a zigzagging shoreline with each inlet forming a natural amphitheater. To this day, you can get in a boat, push a little away from shore, and just speaking in a natural voice anyone on the slopes can hear you, more clearly than if you were standing on shore. If you have ever gone down to watch fishing boats during mackerel season you can often hear the fishmen on the boats talking and calling to one another, it is a neat experience. Jesus knew what he was doing with his request that day.

Jesus begins his relationship with the disciples with a small request, just as he does with others he encounters. For example, the woman at the well in Samaria when he asks her for a drink of water. What seems like an insignificant encounter, changes into something far deeper. Jesus takes a risk on Simon Peter; he asks him to push himself even further—go out into deep water and let down your nets. It is not a small ask. They have laboured the entire night with no success, they have gone through the work of cleaning their nets, they have delayed going home to bed so they can take this near stranger out on a boat, and now he is asking for more. I

often wonder if Simon Peter looked at the shore, and then at the horizon, felt the weariness of a long unproductive day in his very bones, and then sighed. What would he do? He could say no, and our story would end but, instead he decides to take the risk, and as others before him have discovered is met with an abundance that is overwhelming. What had been empty ships are now so weighed down with fish they are endanger of sinking.

Jesus takes a risk on Simon Peter, and Simon Peter takes a risk on Jesus. This account is not about the miracle, it is about Simon Peter's response to Jesus and his call. The miracle is simply a by product of something far more important. Discipleship is about invitation and response. We know what it is to feel tired, perhaps defeated or uncertain in our lives. In those moments we don't want to risk anymore heartache or burden. We want to stay safe, and to hear Jesus ask us to risk, to go out to deep water is not necessarily a call we want to hear. "The invitation to put out into the deep for a catch provides a sharp contrast to our human penchant for the predictable and the routine. It is an invitation to venture onto new ground or new depths, but it also points to new challenges in mission and ministry for the church in every generation...there is the realization that the most profound and significant experiences of God and life are not found in the safe ways and places.

This moment changes everything for Simon Peter. First, he exclaims that he is not worthy, and Jesus hears those concerns. He essentially says, "Peter, I know who you are, and you are exactly who I want." Peter not only says yes but, he also pulls his boat up onto the shore and walks away from it all. The life he had known, for the life he could not have imagined. There is a distinct before and after for Simon Peter, before Jesus, and then life after Jesus. Simon Peter had no idea what he was getting into, and perhaps if he had it might have caused him a little more

pause, but ultimately, he says yes. Sometimes, it is hard to even follow Jesus out into the neighbourhood, let alone to leave everything behind.

Luckily not every call requires us to venture out into the unknown, but it does require us to respond. “God is calling, pulling, pushing us out toward new and boundless horizons. Freeing us from our nets.” Sometimes one of the things faith requires us to do is look at what nets we are holding in our own lives and refusing to let go of. I have been reading a number of annual reports from over the years here and have been struck by how each generation of this church has been called, and how they have answered. It was not always easy, it was not straight forward, but people have always been willing to venture out. One thing we talk about here is the New Beginnings program, it was designed to help churches think about how they are called into the communities and world around them. Just being willing to do it signified that you were willing to venture out onto the water and the into the unknown. Together through small groups and then as a collective we discerned where we felt we were being called, and we are in the process of preparing to draw on a couple of those ideas and try them. We are leaving the nets we know, and the shallows, to venture out into God’s horizons. Who knows what we might find, as Peter discovered it was not really about the fish when he got there, it was about how his yes to Jesus, opened the way for so much more. Together may we continue out into the depths, and answer God’s call as best we can.