



SAINT LUKE'S

"THE CALLING"

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 6:1-13

PSALM 138

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

LUKE 5:1-11

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

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Isaiah and Luke both raise the theme of calling. Isaiah tells us about his own call: it is dramatic and unmistakable. You couldn't miss it if it happened to you! Luke also makes Jesus' call to the disciples very clear; he wraps it around a miraculous catch of fish. Neither call story sounds like daily life as we know it. There are other call narratives in Scripture that are equally dramatic: Moses at the burning bush¹; Saul, literally blinded² with a call to a transformed life with a new name as Paul. Theologically, the church has always been clear that every Christian is called. Everyone who is baptized is called. Called by Jesus. Called to follow Jesus. But the call *narrative* for each Christian is certainly not always so clear. The Prayer Book³ says the ministers of the church are *lay people*, Bishops, priests and deacons. Lay people are the first and primary order of ministry. Baptism is primary ordination to ministry, and ordination without exception. Every baptized Christian is called *by* Jesus but called *to*...what? In every generation young people wonder: What is my calling? It is the central question of young adulthood.

We have many examples in Scripture of different ways that people find their callings. Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John have different call narratives than Saul and Isaiah or Ezekiel or Moses. Sometimes we speak of being called by Jesus as though it is something separate from our everyday lives. This is understandable given the people we single out as saints and heroes of our faith. Much more common though is that we follow Jesus *through* our daily life and work. The disciples' fishing skills are metaphorically useful as they "fish for people" but their change

¹ Exodus 3

² Acts 9

³ Book of Common Prayer p855 Catechism: "The Ministry"

of life is not typical. Usually, Jesus finds us within our lives and using the gifts we have. And the jobs we have are *our* way to follow Jesus. If we find our calling, our purpose in life, we will find ways to follow Jesus within it.

The disciples are found when they are fishing; that is the family business and their way of life. The first pointer towards what we are called to do in life is that **Jesus finds us whatever we are doing**. Retreats and vision quests can be helpful but Jesus can always find us where we are. Jesus reaches us through others, through Word and Sacraments, and sometimes through direct revelation in prayer. For the disciples, their call is wrapped around a miracle of the huge catch of fish. Simon Peter immediately recognizes that this catch is not due to their own fishing skill. He is filled with awe and a sense of his unworthiness. Often in a call narrative in Scripture there is an impediment or objection: I am not qualified. Moses says he is not a good public speaker⁴; Isaiah says he is a man of unclean lips⁵; Simon Peter says he is too sinful, too flawed. What happens next is very important and a life lesson for all of us. Jesus completely ignores Simon Peter's objections. Jesus calls us not based on our potential or merits or abilities but as an act of love, a gift of grace.

Jesus calls us in and through what we are already about. The second pointer is that **we keep on doing what is in front of us until we are called to do or go somewhere else**. A calling is usually a sense of direction, an energy or excitement around a purpose. However, a calling

⁴ Exodus 4:10f

⁵ Isaiah 6:5

is not usually specific about timing, location, particular job description. When Jesus calls the fishermen to fish for people, he doesn't open a scroll and lay out where they will travel on what days in the coming years. The most important quality in discovering the next chapter of *our* calling is **being open to the Holy Spirit** in our daily life. We are in the season of Epiphany – the word itself means revelation. We need to open ourselves to revelation. In prayer we put ourselves at God's disposal so our inner ears and eyes of faith are ready to receive the Holy Spirit's promptings.

Third - we know we have found our calling by the **joy** that springs up in our hearts. Our heart leaps up in readiness to meet the challenge ahead. This is the time and place. Yes, now. Go. The disciples clearly experience this as they leave their nets and follow Jesus. When we find our compass in life, our direction, it can be sudden, it can be gradual – like finding our life partner - but you know by steady joy. Joy is a God-sign. Joy is a way God confirms God's own presence in our lives. I don't mean superficial happiness. I mean the deep joy that feels like life itself. Even the difficult parts are supremely worth doing because it is work you want to do.

Earlier we noticed that Jesus calls Simon Peter and us not based on our potential or merits or demonstrated abilities but as an act of love, a gift of grace. All of us are called to fish for people. Which simply means - share with others what we have experienced in following Jesus. This is what we are called *for*. Any of us can do that. We don't have to have a

theology degree. Apart from Jesus himself, *you* are the person who knows your experience of God best. You are the authority on your spiritual journey and you are allowed – you are authorized by the church – to share your faith. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit given at your baptism and renewed week by week – and you can share your faith. Faith is not a commodity. It is more like a muscle that develops as we use it. Faith grows as we share it. Like loaves and fishes, it never seems like enough until we start to give it away. Typically we are not very evangelistic in the Episcopal Church, but we are part of the Jesus movement and we will want others to share this anchor that saves and strengthens our lives. In Luke, Jesus says to the disciples: *from now on, you will be catching people*. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is even more direct. He says: *I will make you fish for people*. The disciples don't share their faith alone and in their own strength, Jesus does it through them. Jesus is on the road with us. Do we trust that? Do we trust the Holy Spirit? Have we ever tried it? This week, I invite each of us to try sharing our faith in words or deeds or both, and see. Keep it simple and keep it humble and not showy. Try sharing your faith this week and see where it leads. Or – rather – see where Jesus leads.

AMEN

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