

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' And he said, 'Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand."

Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed.'

Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said:
'Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
until the Lord sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

Even if a tenth part remains in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled.'

The holy seed is its stump.

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

SERMON:

How I love these stories - the imagery and ways they relate to us today, even though most of us have probably never literally cast nets into deep waters, hoping to fill our boats with fish. Yet somehow, they speak to the fears, longings and callings that each of us live on a daily basis. This story, both the scriptures we heard today, offer so many threads to follow - I invite you to join me in looking at few together. But I start with a story...

Last week, during the bitter cold, I headed to Lancaster, where I used to live, to visit with a friend on hospice. While there, I called an older couple who I got close to through church. They live in retirement home, and for various reasons, several years ago they asked if I'd be their medical Power

of Attorney. Wanting to check in on them and hear about their lives, I left a phone message suggesting lunch the next day. When she returned my call, Alyce said 'I thought you were going to say you don't have time to do this anymore. That you're too busy taking care of your congregation, that you don't want to do this for us.' It's not the first time Alyce has expressed this worry. Ever since I told them I was moving to State College I've been assuring them that I still wanted to remain connected, that I had every intention of remaining involved. Yet, seeing a call from me, she was fearful, not trusting that she was worthy. How often we can live out of that space - that we're not worthy, not worthwhile. In this time of having so many demands calling for our attention, it's easy to live out of a scarcity model, one that tells us we're not good enough, don't have enough instead out of a model of abundance. Yet this story in today's gospel is one of abundance - so much unexpected abundance that it's down right too much for them to handle.

Our reading from Luke's gospel begins with Jesus, this man who just a chapter earlier has proclaimed that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic announcement, that he is the one who will bring good news to the poor and release to the captives - he, who has been healing, teaching and preaching to crowds that have both tried to hurl him off a cliff and others who go seeking him, trying to prevent him from leaving them because he does such magnificent things. It's this Jesus who shows up beside the lake of Gennesaret, also known as the sea of Galilee, and asks Simon, a fisherman who is washing his nets to take him out in his boat.

Just a few verses earlier in this chapter, we're told that Jesus had entered Simon's house and cured his mother in law from a high fever, staying with them long enough to share in a meal together. So this Jesus, and his power, was not new to Simon.

But it's been a long night. Simon and his partners are tired and probably wondering what they're going to eat, how they're going to provide for their family, since they caught nothing. Nothing. Makes you wonder what kind of fishermen they were.

And so out they go. Jesus teaches, keeping the crowds at a safe distance, and when he's done speaking, he says to Simon - put out into the deep water. Get away from the safety of the shore - go into the place where you can't see the bottom, where you don't know what's beneath you. Take me out there, Simon.

And poor Simon, weary to the bone, with no income, no food to take home, probably ready for bed, responds wearily and pessimistically "Master we have worked all night long but have caught nothing". Do you know that feeling? Like you've worked and worked and come up short? With nothing to show? Weary? Then Simon says:

“Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets”. Somewhere between those two statements, “Master, we’ve worked all night... and Yet, if you say so”, Simon seems to have had a recognition of who this man was. What happened to Simon in that moment? Did he recall the healings and casting out of demons that were done in previous days, or the way Jesus healed his own mother in law? **What allowed Peter to move from weary resignation to a willingness to be surprised?**

So that’s one major piece from this story that I encourage you to spend some time thinking about - What do you need to call on, to be reminded of, to shift you from weary resignation to a willingness to be surprised by the way God shows up? There’s something here that’s really important, I think. Because for many of us, we often seem to be working, especially doing this Kingdom work, with a spirit of weariness, not surprise, and certainly not expecting abundant results.

Here, in this story, the disciples didn’t receive their calling to join in Jesus’ kingdom work while they were in a designated sacred space like the synagogue, or while praying in their homes. Their call did not come while they were quietly listening for it, but , rather, at the end of a long, sweaty day at work, when they were discouraged and ready to pack it in for the day. They were not doing anything grand or holy. They were mending their nets, after a failed attempted at fishing, yet getting ready to do it all over again.

It was in the midst of their weariness and pessimism that Jesus shows them something new and amazing - a sign of holy abundance in the

seemingly barren waters. Holy abundance found in the weariness of seemingly barren waters. And it's here, in the weary work, that Jesus says, see what I can do? Don't be afraid, come work with me.

How about for us?

God doesn't usually wait for the times when life is settled and still to call us. God finds us wherever we are, whatever we are doing, and show us something - often with the very materials of our everyday life and work. God uses the details of our particular time and place to catch our attention and throw us a new challenge. It's in the everydayness of our lives that God says, go into the deep waters. Let me take you where you can't easily touch bottom.

How do we actually know when God is beckoning us toward a new future, a new form of service? The disciples, weary as they were, agreed to put their boats back in the water, the deep water, at Jesus' request. And so maybe we need to be open to the voice of the Wise One in our midst. Often, it's just when we are most prone to wonder "is this all there is?" that Jesus comes and drops something sloppy and squirmy, like a boat full of fish, into our too-small lives.

Like the disciples, we have to throw our nets out into the deep waters. Shallow, tentative paddling is not allowed. We are asked to take risks - we could fail and come up with nothing, the boat might capsize, the nets might break.

It's in the deep water that Simon and his companions are caught off guard. Not only did they find fish, they are overwhelmed by the catch. The adrenaline is pumping now - no longer weary, but afraid that they might sink with the weight of the catch - it's then that Simon Peter (it's here that our Simon begins to live into his new name), Simon Peter falls on his knees and says "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man", it's very similar to Isaiah's response "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips" after he witnessed the Lord sitting on his throne. Both Simon Peter and Isaiah confess their unfitness for whatever the Holy has in mind for them. In Isaiah's case, whatever keeps him from his calling is removed by the coal touching his lips to remove his guilt and sin. Here in Luke, where later in the gospel Jesus offers forgiveness of sins many times to many different people, here he simply invites Peter to drop his fear. Whatever Peter means by "I am a sinful man", Jesus responds not with a moral cleansing but with the invitation "do not be afraid". Jesus does not tell him to repent; He does not tell him to go and sin no more; he does not tell him to sell all that he has. Simon says that he is a sinner and Jesus tells him 'do not be afraid' and calls him to become a fisher of people. Boom. Let's go, there's work to be done.

Several years ago I was working as a hospice chaplain - it was the job I'd dreamed of, worked for, and yet a few years into it I was feeling dry, depleted, not sure where to go. My nets were coming up empty. What was

I to do? I thought this was my calling, my vocation, my way to serve God. Had I made a mistake? It was a time full of prayer and waiting. Over time, I felt the Spirit of God was nudging me to take the leap - to quit my hospice job without being sure where I'd end up next. I wasn't even sure if I would remain a chaplain. Some in my family were afraid for me, advising caution - watch out for the deep water, you might sink. Thankfully a spiritual director I was working with listened carefully, with me, for the moving of the Spirit. She encouraged me to say, here am I, send me - even when I didn't have any idea what was next. She trusted that I was doing the inner work I needed to do, and that God would provide. And so I quit my job, lived on savings, watched and waited. It wasn't all that long until I learned of a new position opening up in oncology chaplaincy that provided an open door - a path of service that hadn't existed a few months before.

When we risk going into the deep waters, when we experience the turbulence of the unexpected, Jesus simply says 'don't be afraid'.

Living into our vocations, our ways of serving God and one another, may well bring hardships, Isaiah was not given an easy message to share, we know the disciples suffered, but the suffering from living a life that is too-small is real as well.

When we risk what we have known for the sake of responding to God's call on our lives, we will be given all that we need and more. The gospel stories remind us of this again and again.

Jesus said to this band of tired, weary fishermen: Don't be afraid...there's work to be done. Follow me.

Do you ever find yourself thinking - I can't do that, not me, I don't have what it takes.... I'm sinful - not the one up for the task... Might Jesus simply say "Kate, don't be afraid" "Andrew, don't be afraid", "Karl, Blannie, Wally, Cathy, JoDee, don't be afraid...

How might Jesus be inviting you to go deep, without fear, and follow him?

Amen.