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OMC

The Beloved Disciples:
Luke 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Good morning Everyone,

This morning we are given stories that circle around discipleship. In our gospel text, Jesus calls Simon, James and John, to be the first disciples recruited in the book of Luke. As a nice bookend, Paul declares in his letter that he is the last disciple that Jesus meets with, to personally recruit into this work. While the stories of their callings are very different, each disciple respond to Jesus' invitation by making it clear that they may not be the ones for this job.

Starting with Simon, Jesus has just finished up this beautiful teaching moment and then seems ready to end his speech with a dramatic miracle to show he comes with actions to back up his words. And Jesus turns to Simon, **“Pull out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”** Now Simon addresses Jesus as Rabbi, showing that he already holds respect and admiration for Jesus, but he doubts himself. He has been out all night and he has caught nothing – he is not the right guy for the job to assist Jesus in finishing up this service with a big bang. But Jesus has asked him, and Simon believes in Jesus enough that he decides to go ahead and do what he says; **“if you say so, I'll lower the nets.”**

Then of course the fish start coming in and when Simon realizes what happened his reaction isn't to jump up and down in celebration. Instead, he falls on his knees saying, **“leave me Rabbi, for I'm a sinner.”** This catch is extraordinary, astounding, and miraculous. But Simon started this conversation with the confidence of someone who can't catch a single fish, and now they are overflowing with them. And yet, the whole thing is very overwhelming, and there is so much goodness and glory that he feels smaller than ever. He's intimidated, and humbled, and he turns to Jesus and goes 'hey man, I'm not good enough for you.'

Now in Paul's letter he states that his purpose is to remind the community of the core of the Gospel. He is circling back to the centre of this life and faith, using dramatic language to shake listeners back to the foundation of their beliefs. But if you look at our chunk of scripture, he spends half of the verses talking about himself. About what it meant for Jesus to call him. For Paul, reflecting on what it means to be God's church is tied to his understanding of what it meant to be chosen by Jesus. He includes the calling of the other disciples as well, as if for Paul to understand God is to be invited in to this community, to know that you are accompanied in this life.

When he names his own calling, he still seems to be grappling with the absurdity that he should be in this group, declaring "**I am the least of the apostles... I do not even deserve the name.**" Even with all the life and energy he has put into his work of discipleship, all the hard work of turning his life on its head, he knows that he remains flawed, and yet somehow things are still happening in God's Kingdom. When Paul says that **all this is by the grace of God**, it reminds me of Simon looking at the boats bursting with fish and knowing for certain that he had nothing to do with that catch.

These individuals both have these moments where they are confronted with their deficiencies, and, because of this, feel completely unable to contribute. Simon the fisherman who catches no fish, Paul the religious leader who has Jesus appear and explain the violence Paul is pursuing in the name of his faith is against God's wish. And then they are called to continue on with their work. Altered by their contact with Jesus, forever changed, but built out of the identity they already possess. Simon is to become a fisher of all humankind; Paul is to continue to be a religious leader, but now in Jesus' name.

They find themselves more aware than ever of their own limits and scarcity, but Jesus comes alongside them and believes in them. In Luke's gospel Jesus uses the term '**deep water**' implying that there may be unexplored areas of potential beyond the perceived limits, resources, and energy. He doesn't contradict Simon in his confession of

being sinful. Jesus looks at these humans confessing all their brokenness and failings, and sees the truth in the rough edges, but doesn't limit them to these rough edges. Jesus also sees the good, the unique beauty and giftings that are all mixed up in the fragility of being flawed. Jesus calls in those around him, knowing the weaknesses and the mistakes they have made and will continue to make, and still chooses to believe in the best *in us*.

I think over the last couple of years. I have felt a lot of the skills or attributes that I used to find identity in get a little weaker, a little wobbly. I often feel like Simon the fisherman who confesses he can't catch any fish. I see all the ways that I am failing or floundering, all the places my energy *could* be or *used* to be but isn't anymore. And when I read these calls to discipleship and imagine being in their place, I know exactly why Simon tells Jesus to leave, and why Paul, years into his ministry, is writing about how he is definitely not supposed to be here. It is so easy to get caught up in our flaws and our failings. Especially when our context makes so many things that used to be sound, feel so shaky.

Author Anne Lamott has an exercise that she does with her Sunday school class, and I think its a perfect fit for our scripture lesson – for all ages. She looks out at her dear human people and says: **you know what? You are loved and chosen, isn't it wild? You, in your current mood, possibly a little cranky and also teary and maybe a bit of a mess; are loved. Outside of your comfort zones, you're chosen, you're a chosen child. Then she goes, is there anyone here who is a little tired this morning? You know what? You are loved and chosen, in this moment exactly as you are. Is there anyone who is only half listening to this because it's been a very long week and your concentration is just shot? You are loved and chosen. Anyone who spoke too gruffly to their family or didn't get done what they meant to or lost your cool and got in a Facebook fight even though you knew it wasn't going to help? You are loved and chosen.** So, take a moment to let that sink in. It's the most radical thing you can ever decide to believe and live by.

Our scripture stories of discipleship both acknowledge the emptiness and the bleakness within the human experience, and they also contain encouragement and recognition in this source of boundless love and support we have in Jesus. Jesus sees the good in us, even when we haven't been at our best in a long time. Jesus who knows everything about us, everything about our current context, all the things we haven't done well or haven't done at all. And Jesus walks up to us and says, 'perfect, you are exactly who I have been looking for.'

Jesus invites Simon into deep water work, into personal, relational work, where healing and plenty follow and mark the encounters of the disciples with Jesus and God's people. Jesus brings out the best in us, like our most cherished friends that always reminds us that we are wonderful, and skilled and worthy of love even though they know all our shortcomings. And as Paul takes time to remind his community what it means to be church, his reflections remind us that we are chosen just as we are, and we are called to follow in the ways of Jesus. We as a community get to imitate Jesus in believing in the best in each other. We can come alongside one another and acknowledge when someone is at less than their best, when they make mistakes, and we choose to remind them that they are also loved. We continue to nurture one another in a community of beloved disciples.

So, let's start there. Let's be each other's with all of our frayed edges, with the things we admit only to our best friends, with the people who are hard to love, who feel impossible to forgive, beginning with ourselves, with the shames, with the self-loathing and fear that we're not enough. With the hope we try to hold on to, but sometimes lose sight of. With one another, Holy, imperfect, sloppy, joyful, angry, irritated, tired, or maybe just hungry. But in all of this, in every circumstance: loved and chosen. By God and by one another. Amen.

Sources: New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Kate Bowler's Podcast 'Everything Happens' interviewing Anne Lamont; Working Preacher Commentary Notes by Kendra A. Mohn

Benediction: *(Rev. Nora Vedress)*

So now we leave this space of worship
And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain,
the path constantly changing,
we know some things that are as solid and sure
as the ground beneath our feet,
and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.
We know Christ's light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit is here,
found in the space between all things,
closer to us than our next breath,
binding us to each other,
until we meet we again,

Go in peace.