

Loving God, make each of us part of the catching and of the being caught. Amen.ⁱ

Simon and his friends encounter Jesus in today's lesson at the end of a long night of fishing. Tiresome, hot, sweaty. Stinky, smelling, and on this night, unsuccessful fishing. It's tempting to be distracted by the fishing story That Luke gives us. Here is another epiphany, a miracle even. Jesus is shown forth to have command over the elements of nature by providing an abundance of food.

The story is seen by some as justification for what has become known as The 'Prosperity Gospel'. In the Prosperity Gospel worldview, if you give to God, then God will give to you. In this story, they would say, we have an example of Jesus having a need. He needed to get away from the crowd for awhile, and Simon allowed Jesus the use of his boat. In return, Simon was given, by God, a huge catch of fish. A return, as it were, on his investment.

When I was a student at Oral Roberts University, I remember Oral preaching on this scripture on more than one occasion. He described this haul of fish as a net-breaking, boat-sinking load. The Prosperity Gospel. Oral called this 'Seed Faith Living.' If you plant a seed out of your need, Then God will give you abundance in return. Other names that you might recognize from your late-night channel surfing include Jim & Tammy Baker from the 1980's, or today's stars of that scene: T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer, and most significantly, Joel Osteen.

You give to God, and God will give to you. That is not a theology to which I subscribe, and I think that it misses the point of today's reading from Luke.

This encounter between Simon and Jesus isn't about the intuition of Jesus concerning where the fish are biting. Or even about Jesus' having some type of divine knowledge about the fish. The encounter between Simon and Jesus is not about Simon's need for a load of fish. I don't think the encounter between Simon and Jesus is about Simon's skill, or lack thereof, or his luck, or lack thereof, as a fisherman.ⁱⁱ

The point is that God meets Simon – and each one of us – right in the middle of our lives, and invites us to go deeper. Invites us to move out of the safety of the shallow end, And to go deeper.

Invites us, right at the point of our failure, to go deeper. Invites us, at the time when we have struggled the hardest, to go deeper. Invites us, when we've fished all night and don't have a single thing in our net to show for it, to go deeper.

All night long, and nothing.

How well does that describe where our spiritual lives have been from time-to-time? Perhaps you come to church primarily for spiritual renewal, as a place to find 'strength for the journey'. Have you ever been bored in church? Have you ever said, with Simon, *All night long, and nothing to show for it?* Perhaps God is inviting you to go deeper.

Maybe you come to church as place where you can put your faith into action. Have you ever been dissatisfied or frustrated? Unhappy with decisions or the direction of the church – or perhaps the seeming lack of decision making, or the lack of a clear direction? *All night long,*

and nothing to show for it? Perhaps God is inviting you to go deeper.

Because that is where God will most often meet us. When we least expect it. When we feel the most uncomfortable, the most itchy, the most frustrated, the most dissatisfied.

When I reflect back on my own life, I can find plenty of times when I was flush with financial and career success. When I was flying high, everything was good; when I knew right where all the fish were going to be.

I thought that I loved the deep water. I thrived on every challenge to go deeper. Because I was in control.

Or so I thought.

God finally had to take a 2x4 up against my spiritual hard head to get my attention. And that's when I found out that I was in fact playing it very, very safe, in the kiddie-end-of-the-pool-of-life.

My career in the oil and gas industry and the success that I was enjoying there was not, in fact, all the God had in mind for me. It was all – everything in fact – that I had in mind for myself.

But apparently, it wasn't all the God had in mind for me. And after I came to my senses, I trusted God to hold my hand out into the deep waters of ordained ministry.

So, I believe this story in Luke's gospel actually has nothing to do with fish. Simon and his friends were professional fishermen. They had their own boats and nets. They certainly knew how to fish, and they certainly knew that in the Sea of Galilee you fish at night – not in the bright sunlight of the day. Nevertheless, Simon's agreed to go out into the deep and cast his nets, just as Jesus suggested.

Jesus called Simon, and I believe that each of us are called, to go out into the deep places.

- To those deep places in our individual spiritual lives.
- To those deep places in our lives in this worshipping faith community.
- To those deep places in our work together in this place to welcome the stranger, to return the radical hospitality that God has extended to each of us.
- To those deep places where we can co-create with God a society and culture that provides safety and justice to those who have the least.

Any one of those deep places will require us to trust one another more.

Any one of those deep places will require us to trust God more.

That's the point of today's lesson. It's not that if we plant a seed out of our need, that God will give us a net-breaking boat-sinking load.

It's not about an abundance of material prosperity.

It's about an abundant life.

A life lived deeply. It's about living our lives deeply into the trust in spite of our fears; in spite of our frustrations; in spite of our all-night-fishing-with-no-results.

God has an abundant life in mind for us. An abundant life, lived out in the deep.

Loving God, Make each of us part of the catching and of the being caught.

Fifth Sunday after The Epiphany, Year C

✠ Isaiah 6:1-8

✠ Psalm 138

✠ 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

✠ Luke 5:1-11

ⁱ Praying the Text. The Center for Liturgy at Saint Louis University, Feb 3, 2007

ⁱⁱ Fred Craddock. *Luke Interpretation Series*. page 70