

Your Job

A Sermon on Luke 5:1-11 by the Rev. Philip Major
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We are facing a few challenges in the world right now. I encourage you to remember that you have a calling. It is not your job to fix all of the problems. Your job is to be a witness to the resurrecting power of God's love in our lives. You have a calling to do a small piece of the work. You have a calling to share the love God has placed in the center of your life.

What will this look like for you and me? Let's see what we can learn about our vocations from Luke chapter five.

Once while Jesus was standing beside the sea of Galilee, 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.

God enters into our lives. This is the first thing for us to remember as we consider our vocations. God is constantly entering into our lives, into our context, into the places of work that are so familiar to us. Sometimes we give the idea of vocations a kind of Hollywood interpretation. We imagine that in order to follow our vocation we must go to a different, perhaps exotic, place. But we turn Jesus' idea upside down when we do this. God is coming to us, calling to us, in the places where we are living and working.

When Jesus 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."

Notice this is a conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter. If we are engaged in our vocation, we will be in conversation with God. There will be back and forth. We will listen for what God is saying to us. We will argue with God at times. This is the nature of following a vocation.

When Simon Peter had put his net out in deep water, he and his partner caught so many fish their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

There are several important ideas in this portion of the story. First, notice that this is considered to be a miracle. Simon Peter caught so many fish that his boat began to sink. Yet the miracle is not supernatural, that is, it does not violate the laws of nature. There may be a scientific story behind the enormous catch of fish, an explanation Peter does not see and we do not see. Notice that the line between God's work and the results of human endeavors, is grey and blurry and not especially well-defined.

Second, notice that there are many thousands, perhaps millions of fish out there in the sea of Galilee. The question is what will it take to find the fish and catch them? This is the central question for us as we follow our vocations. There is a great potential for the enormous haul of fish, for great productivity in the world. What do we need to do to end up in the most productive activity that engages God's love?

When Simon Peter saw the enormous catch of fish, 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.

When we come face to face with a call to engage in our vocation, our response is sometimes like Simon Peter, 'Go away from me'. Many times we say we are unworthy or incapable of fulfilling God's call to us. Sometimes other people say we are unworthy or incapable. Sometimes we say we are just not interested. We make excuses for why we cannot possibly respond to the deep need of the world. Our protestations are an indication we understand the importance and scale of the challenge God is

calling us to engage. We forget God is calling us to engage in something that is ultimately God's work. When we are responding to God's call, we do not have to do everything perfectly. We do not have to be certain in our abilities or strength. We just need to be certain in our love. If we are responding with love, seeking to serve others, God will be working alongside us.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid." Simon Peter has some fears. If you are engaged in your vocation you will also have some fears, or at least some feeling of uncertainty or inadequacy, because you will know the importance of the work you are taking on.

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid." When we are engaged in our vocations the task will stretch us. At times we will need support from outside ourselves. This means turning to God for support. It is Jesus who says, 'Do not be afraid.'

Then Jesus said to Simon, "from now on you will be catching people." Notice Jesus is not asking Simon Peter to do a 360 or a 180 degree turn. God calls us to take on a task that is like a 90 degree turn from what we have done before. Simon's previous work was to be a fisherman. This required skill, patience, strength and courage. Simon's new vocation is to catch people, to draw them into God's family. Simon's new vocation will require skill, patience, strength and courage.

We have a way of radicalizing this story. We tell the story so it sounds like Simon's work as a fisherman was not important, that it did not use his skills, that it was not his vocation. We universalize the story in a way that gives the impression that the work of the fishermen, the work of the carpenter, the work of custodian is secondary in God's eyes.

We need to remember the meaning of fish for the people of Galilee. Fish was the most important food for them. Fish was their main source of protein, and sometimes the only food available to eat.

So Simon's new vocation will be somewhat different from his old vocation, but his vocation of being a fisherman was vitally important. Simon's new vocation is like a 90 degree turn from his old vocation. His vocation as a fisherman prepared him for his new vocation. It's the same way with you. If you are taking on a new vocation, it doesn't mean your previous vocation was not important. Your new vocation must, by definition, build on some of the skills you have been practicing for years.

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Following our vocations means making choices about what we will and what we will not do. You have probably notice that you have a limited amount of time and energy in your life. What is most important to you?

What does it mean that 'They left everything and followed him?' Like the previous verse, we have a tendency to universalize or take this idea to dangerous extremes. We are sometimes left with the image of Simon Peter and the other disciples saying good-bye to their families forever. There have been times when a person pursued their vocation and members of their family did not accompany them as they changed, but a god who tells someone to leave their family in order to pursue their vocation would not be called the Lord of love. Following our vocational path is always about living with more of God's love in the center of our lives.

What kind of work is God calling you to in the coming year? Is there a 45 degree or 90 degree turn in the road for you, a slight change from what you have done before? Vocation is the place where your deep passion finds its match in the deep needs of the world.

Somewhere out there is a deep need of the world that has your name on it. When you are engaged in meeting that need, the energy will be like Simon Peter and his friends pulling nets full of fish into their boats. Somewhere in the world is a deep need that is matched by your passion to love and serve.

There are a few very big challenges out there in the world. Let's remember it's not our job to fix everything, or even to fix a small piece of the world. It is our job to join in one part of God's work. We are called, in our various ways, to be just be witnesses, to be witnesses to the resurrecting power of God's love in our lives.