

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
February 4, 2007

Luke 5:1-11

“Go Deeper”

Pat read for us the two lessons appointed for this fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Remember an epiphany is about the “aha...I get it...light bulb over the head” moments of life. For those of us who live in the frozen tundra of the north—at least that’s what it feels like today—this time of year is when we hunker down in warm places. It is the time when we curl up with a good book and play games with our children and take some time to stop the merry-go-round of life and just be. “Be still and know that I am God” is the way the Psalms speak about that kind of being.

These two lessons are the most well-known of the “call” stories in scripture. Isaiah has a vivid experience of God’s holy presence where the walls shake and the house fills with smoke...that would be a sure fire way for God to get our attention. Of course, we’d think earthquake or fire and we’d be out of here!! Isaiah’s first response is “woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips.” We would say “woe is me for I am a sinful unworthy human being.” Then Isaiah hears the voice of God calling to him—“whom shall I send and who will go?” And Isaiah says, “Here am I. Send me.”

From the gospel according to Luke we hear about Jesus in the midst of a crowd that is pressing in on him from all sides. Jesus sees these boats and some fisherman cleaning their nets and Jesus asks one, whose name is Simon Peter, to take him out a little ways where he can teach and preach more easily for the crowd to hear.

So, Jesus is sitting in Simon Peter’s boat after the crowds have gone. Jesus knows that Peter is exhausted from his own efforts at fishing all night. He knows that he has caught nothing, but even still he turns to Peter and invites him to do something. “Go out into the deep water,” he says, “and there let down your nets.” It sounds pretty simple doesn’t it? But is it really? Do you know what Jesus is really asking here?

He is asking Simon Peter to trust him. To trust him so much that Peter would be willing to leave the shallow places in his life and in his work and begin to explore the depths. To go to the limits of what he thinks is possible, not only for him but for those all around him. “Go out into the deep water,” says Jesus, “trust me and see what happens.”

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That must be why Peter is reluctant to do it at first. He knows that once he takes the risk of leaving what is familiar and comfortable the direction of his life might very well change. He knows that when he leaves the shallow places behind—shallow places in his work, shallow places in his relationships with others, to himself and to God — and dares to go just a little bit deeper in trust, things are going to be different for him and for anyone who is around him.

A good way to resist responding to God’s call to enter the depths of our lives is to say something like Simon said to Jesus: Oh, there’s no use for me to go into those depths, Jesus. I have fished those waters already. I have tried to pray. I have tried to study. I have tried to become a servant like you, Jesus. I have tried to live out my faith in a way that would please you, Jesus. And I have come up empty every single time. I am just tired. I’m tired of fishing those same waters. There is nothing out there in the depths for me.

It’s just another way of saying I am not good enough to do this. I am not smart enough, Jesus. I’m not young enough, I’m not old enough, I’m not faithful enough. It is just best that you leave me alone. It’s best that you give up on me like I’ve given up on myself. I am a sinful human being. I have tried everything that you have asked me to do, and it doesn’t work.

This is the place that Peter becomes a model for discipleship. It happens in the moment when Peter responds to Jesus’ call and says, “but, if you say so.” Then off he goes—perhaps reluctantly—out into the deep water and there he finds abundance like he has never imagined.

Oh, it’s not the kind of abundance that makes him rich. It’s the kind of abundance that shows Peter how rich God’s grace and love are. It’s the kind of abundance that shows how much God wants to be in relationship with all of us.

Jesus doesn’t call Peter to be anything other than who he is. He doesn’t call Peter to be a rabbi like him, or even to a career in carpentry. Jesus calls Peter to live in the depths of his own life, not to try to live out Jesus’ life. Peter remains at heart a fisherman who has a heart for Jesus and for the humanity that Jesus serves. It is a call into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus. Jesus becomes the window through which Simon Peter goes deeper into his own understanding of who God is.

Go deeper. Going deeper is how we learn about who we are as God’s beloved. Going deeper is how we discern what God is calling us to do. Oh, we may hear the initial call, but until we go deeper into a relationship with the one who calls, we

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may only skim the surface of all that God intends. Going deeper is how we develop our inner spirit, our center, the core of our being and how that connects us to the God who created us. Going deeper activates God's presence that already resides in us. Going deeper develops a storehouse of strength and coping abilities that will see us through the tough times, the dark moments, the crises of our lives.

How do we go deeper? How do we trust this God who calls, sometimes from the rumbling and the smoke and sometimes from an overwhelming experience of the presence of God?

We are doing one thing right now—we've come to worship God. We've come seeking to deepen our relationship with God and with one another. I believe that the habit of worshipping together is important to our spiritual development. Worship is about offering ourselves to God. It is about waiting for God. It is about trusting God. It is about living with God. It is about orienting life toward God.

Worship is not the only thing that takes us deeper. Spirituality is not something that we bring out on Sunday. It is an everyday adventure. So in this coming week, pay attention to the wonder of the world. Live in the present moment. Don't obsess about the past or worry about the future. All we need is right here now. And let's slow down. Meditate. Pray without words. Be still in the presence of life. Listen. Going deeper will lay up inner storehouses of strength and the ability to cope that will carry us through the struggles of life.