

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Luke 5:1-11

When I was serving in Lunenburg County Nova Scotia, I learned a great deal about the rhythm of life. There were many people who worked on the huge fishing boats during the warm seasons and cut lumber in the winter.

There were additional fishermen that fished for lobster. My family and I had the privilege of going out in a lobster boat one morning as they harvested their catch. They told us to wear clothes that we will never want to wear again because they are going to be stinky. They were right.

The process of lobster fishing is that the “traps” are put out in the bay for the evening. Each day, the traps would be put in the water marked with the same-coloured buoy (everyone’s was a different colour so they did not take each other’s catch). In the morning, the traps would be emptied and rebaited.

To pull the nets in, you had to grab them with a gaffe and hook them to a small pulley, and they would arise. As each of the traps was opened, you never knew what you were going to get. Small fish, shells, and maybe a lobster. The lobsters had to be a certain size, or they got thrown back in. It was not a great catch that day. Nonetheless, my son, who was nine at the time, absolutely loved being a gaffer and our day on the water.

The story of Simon Peter, James and John fishing sure is different. They have caught nothing in their attempt to fish the night before. Of course, they did not bait their nets but just threw them overboard. This resulted in a catch of nothing. Jesus, tired from dealing with the crowd, takes a boat out to preach to the crowd and then at the same time tells

James and John to drop their nets on the other side of the boat. The nets, when brought in have load after load of fish, other boats came around to help collect the fish. There were so many. The ordinary idea of fishing resulted in such an extraordinary catch.

Imagine watching the boats being filled to overflowing. What did the people think? They were surprised that is for sure. Simon Peter felt himself to be unworthy to be in Jesus' presence. Simon Peter had seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law just a short time before and now this? Simon Peter was afraid of the skillset of Jesus.

This story is not just about Simon Peter, James, John and Jesus. I think this story is about us. Think about it. Here we are living our comfy lives, keeping warm in this church where we gather. Enjoying our homes, Netflix and chillin' with hopefully enough food to keep us nourished. I am sure some of us feel unworthy of God's love too. But the truth is God says to us, "Do not be afraid. I love you. While you may feel unworthy of my great outpouring of love, know that I will always love you unconditionally". God called the disciples to ministry when he filled their boats. God calls us to ministry in our baptism.

This fishing story is a story of vocation – our vocation. Think about it. The soon to be disciples are tired. They are frustrated. They may be demoralized. And now they are being told to keep trying what they've been trying for the entire night. Really?

Simon's initial response is weary but obedient: "*Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*" The mission is fishin'.

Today as we will soon be witness to Charlie's baptism, I want to remind each of you that through your baptism you are called to "let your light so shine before others," living out your vocation of sharing the gospel.

Years ago, I went to a workshop called *Fresh Expressions*. It was an Anglican sponsored learning event with different presenters and theologians. We talked about a number of items. The first was the reason why evangelism is so important. You probably wonder as you hear the word evangelism or the word Evangelical, which is in the title of our church, "What do they mean?" The word originates from the Greek word euangelion, meaning "good news" or "gospel". We looked at the demographics of the Canadian population. One presenter, John Bowen, theologian at Toronto School of Theology, Professor of Evangelism, gave us some statistics about evangelism. I cannot remember the exact numbers of the following study that he presented but I do have a rough idea. John Bowen¹ said in North America there are twenty percent of people who are actively worshipping or partaking in a regular faith community. He said other than regular attenders on Sundays there were four other groups that are missing in our Churches in North America. There are thirty percent who are exploring their spirituality and seeking to find a church home. They are called seekers. Twenty-five percent are de-churched people – individuals who used to go to church but no longer do. These people would be on our responsibility list at Zion. There is twenty percent of the population who are unchurched.

¹ Statistics taken from Fresh Expressions workshop. Other ideas from John Bowen, *Green Shoots out of Dry Ground*, p.11-13.

They have none or very little experience with Christian communities. Five percent of people consider themselves atheists (people who don't believe in a higher power).

What we find when we look at these statistics and the evangelism field there is a possibility for us to touch eighty percent of the population with the love of God and the gospel. Eighty percent! That is why evangelism is so important! That is why this year we will be working together to produce an evangelism strategy.

The future disciples dropped everything, showed no fear when they brought their boats in and decided to follow Jesus. They did not remain with the crowds and try to share the gospel with them. It would have been easy for them to remain tied up in the business of their own lives. To continue to struggle with the nets of their lives could have been their response. But rather than remain all messed up they chose to follow the One who was continuing to show others his Messiahship. We will hear about their travels later in the gospels.

Let's look at where we are today. There are really two types of churches. There is the gathered church and the scattered church. The gathered church is one like us who gathers regularly on Sunday mornings in this church building. God is satisfied that we come to Zion to worship him. Then there is the scattered church. The scattered church exists in places "out there". That is, this work usually done by amateurs or lay people and is done outside the four walls of the church. This church often isn't known. These people share their faith by doing, helping at charities, visiting others, being present at community events and in many other ways. They go unnoticed but act with Jesus in their heart. They follow

Jesus and seek to do mission. They become the gospel much like Simon Peter, John and James did as they followed.

The church is most effective when the church leaves the building. We are called to radical discipleship. We are called to meet people where they are and do ministry in their location and mindset. We are called to be an inclusive community. How scary can that be? We are called to reach out to all people no matter their race, financial status, sexual orientation, or age. Everyone needs to hear the gospel. The church needs to be a welcoming inclusive community. If we can't be the gospel to all people, how are we going to live out our baptismal calling? As a church we also must speak to do social justice. Those who need advocates and support whether human support or financial support need us. We are being called to meet social agency's where they are and help them. It may be the Grind, the Foodbank, First Step Options, the Robbie Dean Centre, the Bernadette House or the Coldest Night of the Year Walk, that needs us to pay attention and be the gospel to them. The gospel calls us to act as one in the image of God. Trust me, going to places outside the church is just as rewarding as having a new person come to Zion.

When I was a teenager, my dad took my brother Stu and my other brother Stew (actually my now brother-in-law) on a fishing trip. You have to understand, I am a fair-weather fisherman. If we are not catching something I just get bored. My brother on the other, hand is that "just one more cast" guy. Well, on that particular day that we were on the lake I had caught nothing. So, I said forget this I am just going to drop a worm to the bottom of the lake beside the boat and see what happens. As time went on, they still

caught nothing. It wasn't long before I felt my line moving. Next thing you know I pulled in a nice pickerel. You should have seen my brother's face. My point in telling you this story is this: catching people with faith is not easy. What is easy though is to keep trying. Don't give up. Sometimes you might have to try something different. Or you may need to take risks to go to places you are not accustomed to going. You never know who might be touched by the gospel.

Be the love of Christ to others. That is my challenge to you this day. Amen.