**February 10, 2019**

**Luke 5:1-11 [[1]](#footnote-1)**

We live with patterns formed by the routines of our lives, the pressures and demands of the world around us. Some of these patterns aren’t intentional or planned, but just the world we find ourselves in. These patterns form *out of* how we live and also form how we live, allowing us to take care of routines without a great deal of thought or planning. These routines develop into our comfort zones. They become our own little world. They are not wrong in themselves; it’s just the way we do things. The danger of our routines is they can grow into a prison around us. We get so comfortable in our patterns that we never venture out of them. We respond to new challenges by saying, “I don't do that,” or even thinking, “I can't do that.” We accept our everyday patterns as the only possibilities in a set world.

Fishing was such a pattern for Simon, James, and John. They had grown up around it. It was the way they made a living; and, thus, it became the way they lived. The routines of sailing, casting, bringing in the catch, cleaning the fish, getting them sold, caring for their equipment were a pattern of living. When Jesus approached these fishermen, he asked them to break their routine, to which they predictably responded, “We did what we always do. Our nets are empty. We've already started cleaning up... (and maybe with an eye roll and weary sigh)… oh all, right… if you say so.” Then what to their wondering eyes did appear -- a HUGE catch that almost broke their nets!

An old *New Yorker* cartoon had the following caption: “This morning opportunity knocked at my door, but by the time I pushed back the bolt, turned the two locks, unlatched the chain, and shut off the alarm system it was gone.” Success doesn’t always follow a decision to try something new, but if you are bold enough to open that patterned prison door, you *will* always be open to new results. And the disciples were at least *open* to Jesus’ request to try fishing again in another way. When they did so, they were astonished to find the very thing which they least expected: fish. Lots of fish.

Their experience may have been the story which shaped a prayer commonly attributed to Sir Frances Drake:

Disturb us Lord when
We are too well pleased with ourselves
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when

With the abundance of things we possess,

We have lost our thirst for the waters of life…

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly

To venture on wilder seas

Where storms will show Your mastery;

Where losing sight of land,

We shall find the stars.

The power of Jesus' call disturbed the disciples to sail *further* *away* from the familiar shore, venturing into deeper waters and finding new stars.

If we, too, are willing to let go of familiar patterns, if we are willing to ask difficult questions, and sail boldly into God’s wild seas, God will empower us with courage and gift us with faith. Faith is not a warm and cozy feeling; faith brings trust even when we feel uncertain. Faith does not guarantee worldly success or happy days; faith promises sustenance even in the midst of storms and poverty.

When the disciples returned to their boats at Jesus’ request and cast their nets, they were disturbed to pull in an overwhelming catch. They had to cry out for help to pull in their nets. (Elie Wiesel once said, “It is a great privilege to be defeated by God.”) And so when the carpenter knew more than the experienced fishermen, it disturbed the emerging disciples away from their old habits, bringing forth new life and dreams. Instead of being imprisoned by old patterns, their faith unlocked the door to unlimited potential and possibilities. They were open to the power of God to lead them forward into an even crazier prediction. “From now on you will be catching people.” Jesus didn’t invite them. He didn’t make a suggestion. He told them a statement of fact.

The story ends as Peter, John, and James walked away from their fishing nets and lifelong patterns. They left everything and marched off into history to find a new life. They were able to do this because they had a new perspective. Having broken their patterned prison, having overturned their routine, they saw God’s possibilities before them. Nothing about their future or life was settled. Mountains of uncertainty stood before them. But this first step was taken.

It’s a great privilege to be defeated by God. It’s a great privilege to be disturbed by God. We can name the times and places when God has taken Sweet Hollow’s patterned prisons and expectations and turned them on end. We can name the ways that we are even now sailing forward into deeper waters, farther from our comfortable shores. These journeys bring curiosity and courage, as well as determination and fatigue. Sailing to new places requires an attention and alertness that you don’t need in familiar waters. So we have to keep our eyes open to what is around us and before us. And we have to find ways to keep up our energy from lagging. It’s exhausting being disturbed by God, and called to service each week. Discipleship requires a certain amount of dogged obedience: Lord, we've preached every week for the past 200 years in this place and still there are cold hearts and dull minds. We’ve shared the good news, mailed thousands of postcards, and invited friends and neighbors, but few find their way into our church family. Jesus, we've marched in the streets time and again and yet injustice persists. God, we've given boxes and cans and diapers to neighbors in need, but there are still people lined up for help every day and every night… Lord, we worked all night long and our nets came up empty (sigh), but if you say the word we'll get back in the boat and go out again. We'll keep praying, preaching, teaching, serving, fishing for people, trusting you will bring abundance in due time, bursting nets, overflowing cups, justice rolling down like water, baskets of food left over, defeating all the nay-sayers, non-believers, and doubts within us.” [[2]](#footnote-2)

Discipleship is not a decision we make once in our lives – at baptism or confirmation or in the joining of a church. Discipleship is an everyday decision to throw our patterned prisons out the window and say, “Sure, Jesus, if you say so.” Everyday. Sure Jesus, we can do it that way (though we don’t think it will work). Sure Jesus, we can ask that person (though they probably won’t come). Sure Jesus, we can share a little more (though we probably won’t have enough). Sure Jesus, we are willing to try again (though we’re exhausted from trying and failing so many times before).

God continues to confront us, challenging the patterns our lives take. God, as he did through Peter, James, and John, can work miracles through us. The question is: are we willing to try?

Pass out paper – write down 1 area or issue that God may be disturbing in your life. Put it in your pocket. Take it home. Spend time watching and praying this week, pushing yourself to say, “Sure, Jesus, if you say so…” These are on pink paper for Valentine’s. Love notes. God loved the disciples enough to pursue them. God loved them enough to disturb them.

1. Shaped by a [sermon](http://day1.org/477-patterns_prisms_and_prisons) by Rev. Wiley Stephens, *Day One;* Feb. 8, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Duffield, Jill. *Presbyterian Outlook* commentary for February 10, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)