

March 8, 2020 Portraits Pt. 1 Jesus: Life Changer Luke 5:1-11

This is a complex little story. A number of things are happening. The fact is, as in real life...one thing leads to another. But first and last, alpha and omega, beginning and end...this is a story about Jesus. It is a portrait of how Jesus changes lives.

Lake Gennesaret is the Sea of Galilee, that wonder of wonders, the one fresh water lake in all of Israel. So this is a story about Jesus ministry in Galilee. And it does not take place up the hillside a mile or two. This is a shoreline story. Jesus is standing on the beach. HE is making decisions. What HE will do. How HE will do it. He sees the boats the fishermen used when they were out on the Lake during the night. HE sees the fishermen, and they are washing their nets, readying their gear for fishing tonight. It is morning. He gets into one of the boats and HE asks Simon called Peter to put HIM out a little from shore. Peter is reluctant. He and his partners are tired. They have been fishing all night and they came up empty. No one is in a good mood. But Peter is polite. He does what Jesus asked him to do.

This transforms the shore which rises from the water's edge into a perfect theater. HE shares with the gathered crowd, the word of God. It's a sermon. They were there, the crowd, to hear Jesus speak. Peter just wants to wash his nets. I suspect he was not in a listening, meditative mood. And yet

his work means one thing leads to another. He is as it were a captive audience. He is trying to let the words wash in one ear and go out the other. But...one thing leads to another.

When Jesus has shared the word of God, HE turns directly to face Peter and HE says, "Put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch." Jesus smiles into that exasperated face of the big fisherman. "Let's go fishing!" Simon Peter starts to explain why he really does not want to do that. Jesus hears his complaint, does not interrupt. HE just smiles at Peter. And Simon Peter rolls his eyes, gives in, and orders Andrew to stow the nets and get into the boat. They are going fishing. They are going to catch nothing. They are going to waste part of the day. And then they are going to have to wash the nets all over again. Peter has been polite, even if a little gruff.

Out on the water, Peter chooses a line of sail. They begin to lower the nets. Peter is probably trying to figure out how he can make Jesus willing to call it a day as soon as possible, because nothing fruitful is going to come of this! The Gospel is silent on this point, so I think Andrew was the one who cried, "Fish!" And when he and Pete began pulling the net in, it started to tear. It gets a little frantic. They call to James and John to bring the other boat and help them. That can't happen in 5 minutes; it takes time. And then as they take fish from the net and bring it in, the sheer scope of the catch becomes obvious. The boat in which Jesus and Andrew and Peter are working is settling. It starts to ship water. This is not

a ship. It resembles a large version of a Canadian canoe. It's not wide. It's not deep.

It is Peter who sees precisely what is happening. They have not been "lucky." He had heard more of that "word of God" than he wanted to and now it flowers inside him, and it bears fruit. Peter experiences a moment that is so wonderful and yet so awful, because he feels exposed. As Luke tells the story, Peter has been a gentleman. But he finds himself on his knees in front of Jesus. He is trembling. Tears flow. Words spill from his some times foul mouth. "Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man." Andrew, James and John are still handling fish from the net. Somebody said the word miracle, and it was not Jesus!

Jesus is still smiling. He touches Peter, probably a hand on the shoulder. His voice is gentle, compassionate. "Don't be afraid!" Peter's eyes lock on the eyes of Jesus. "Don't be afraid, from now on, you will catch men." And Peter nods. He recovers, and they reach shore. They pull up the boats. And the four of them...Peter, Andrew, James and John, leave it all, (boats, nets, fish, a fortune in fish) and they follow Jesus.

Some will ask the question why? Why did they do that? The answer is in the text before us. One thing led to another. And while their understanding is only partial, as is ours, AS IS OURS, each of them can feel it in their bellies: Jesus is Lord. With HIM, just like us, there is nothing to fear. Life has changed, as it always will and as it always does. Peter, Andrew,

James and John, and we too when we are clear headed, know it is safer to follow Jesus, than to fish without HIM, to face life alone.

Let us pray;

Lord we bow before you and we too confess we are sinful men and women. We cling to YOUR rugged cross, aware that in YOU, and YOU alone, we may receive the mercy of not being afraid....for ourselves, for the church, facing the future. Embrace us in YOUR saving love, no matter what we are thinking, and in all the details of what we face. Continue to change us, that we might serve YOUR will, and those with whom you give us the opportunity to share our lives, our gifts, our talents, our compassion, our love, and YOURS. Be glorified as we seek to follow YOU. Amen