

Sermon Luke 5:1-11
6th Epiphany
February 16th, 2025

Recently as I was browsing TV channels, I came across ‘The Deadliest Catch’ on the Discovery Channel. You know ‘The Deadliest Catch’, or at least have heard about it? I was quite surprised to realize that this show is still running – it’s been on the Discovery Channel for 20 years now – and I just had to watch, for nostalgia’s sake – when my kids were younger, this was one of the shows we would watch together.

And the formula of the show is still the same it was back then. I mean, this is a reality show, and the realities of crab fishing haven’t changed much. An official description of the show is: ‘The series documents the events aboard [fishing boats](#) in the [Bering Sea](#) during the Alaskan crab fishing seasons.’ So we are talking heavy duty high sea fishing, during seasons when hurricanes rage and waves toss the boats around like toys. It is not uncommon that, during massive storms, boats sink and people die. And so, we read in the notes about the show, ‘The show's name (The Deadliest Catch) derives from the inherent high risk of injury or death the crews face due to the hazardous work environment and nature of the work itself.’

Being a crew member on one of those boats is considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. It’s paid well – I heard it’s like \$10,000 for two weeks– but still many rookies drop out very quickly. This is not a job for the faint of heart – sometimes I wonder if you have to be a little insane to stick with a job like that.

Anyway, when the pods with the crabs are hauled in – and they can weigh as much as 900 pounds- , every hand on board is needed. All have to pull their forces together and focus on the task at hand. Everyone on deck who just stands around or does his own thing becomes a hazard, adds to the danger - for himself, but for others as well. You can’t just hang out when you are on one of those boats, it’s not a pleasure cruise – you gotta pitch in, for the sake of everyone on board.

Now Simon, later called Peter, knew something about the hard work of fishing – for him, it probably wasn’t quite as extreme as for the crews on ‘The Deadliest Catch’, but fishing on the Lake of Galilee, or Lake Gennesaret, as it was also known, could be dangerous because of

unpredictable winds, storms, and swells. We have some stories about those in the Bible as well. Simon went out, day by day with a crew, braving the deeper and often treacherous waters, throwing out the nets. On good days, they would have to haul in the catch. On bad days, they'd have to go home empty-handed. But Simon knew – you have to keep on trying, every day; you have to put in the work every day, because you never know when you'd be blessed with the abundance that's somehow out there.

Which brings us to today's Scripture lesson: Simon and his crew must be exhausted and quite frustrated on that day that Jesus comes by and is followed by those crowds, hungry for a word, hungry for healing. They hadn't caught anything the previous night, and now, during the day, they have to get ready for the next uncertain tour, washing and mending their nets. And then things take quite an unexpected turn: in the end, those fishermen are called away from their profession, to embark on a different journey.

I think Jesus is very intentional about calling fishermen to be his first followers and co-workers - because they bring many qualities needed for successful ministry. A), they are used to hard working conditions. B), they are patient and can handle frustration on bad days. C), they are excellent team players. D), they are used to uncertain and potentially dangerous situations. And E), they know that the fish won't just jump on board, but that it takes lots of work to track them down and bring them in.

One more subtle reason why fishermen are chosen by Jesus to help with his ministry and to bring about the kingdom of God can be found in the words that Simon utters when he realizes that Jesus probably had something to do with that unexpected huge catch he and his co-workers haul in. Do you remember what he says? 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.'

Isn't that an interesting response? And kinda unexpected – I mean, a more natural response would be something like, 'Thanks, Jesus!' But Simon seems bewildered, maybe even scared; he realizes that something is happening here that's much bigger than he is, something that is way over his head. Simon is humbled by the whole experience. And that may be yet the most important quality of a fisher of people: humility. Because only someone who is humble, who is not too full of themselves, who is willing and open to encounter others as fellow travelers on this road of life, no matter, who they are and where they are from – someone who is relatable –

has a chance of building relationships with people, and ‘reel them in’ that way, and invite them into this amazing realm of God where all are reconciled and on even footing.

And think about it: Jesus could take those humble fishermen to places and to people that other folks would never go, or would not want to go – folks who might think of themselves as righteous, better than thou, or more pious than thou. Jesus didn’t call priests or scribes or Pharisees. And as we know, Jesus sought out the poor, the disenfranchised, the sick, the outcast, the untouchables, and those who were considered sinners.

So here we are, roughly 2,000 year later. Called to follow Jesus and be his co-workers today, fishing for people in the sense that we invite them into God’s realm of peace and justice – not so much through zealous words and preaching and revivals, like ‘in the good old days’, but rather through relationships, and our loving and caring and compassionate deeds – by ministering to those who are in dire need; by walking the walk, and not only talking the talk.

Our first instinct when we realize that we are chosen may be along the lines of Simon – get away from me, Lord! Maybe because it seems to be way over our heads. Maybe because we are not comfortable with the whole idea of ministering – isn’t it enough that I go to church? Maybe because we are not humble enough to go to people and places we deem way beneath us. Or maybe because we know it can be dangerous, especially in times like these, as the current administration attacks many basic tenets of the Christian faith, like mercy, compassion, and care for the disenfranchised.

You know it’s bad when the pope and U.S. Roman Catholic bishops sharply criticize the U.S. government for their policies that seek not only to cut aid to those in this country and all over the world who need it the most, but also slander and threaten institutions that continue to provide such much needed aid. And that didn’t only happen to Catholic charities, but the Episcopalians and Lutherans as well – I don’t know if any UCC social service agencies have been affected.

And amid such attacks on values taught by Jesus himself, it’s not only the Roman Catholics who are taking the stand – our Quaker siblings were the first to file a lawsuit against the government. And just this past week, 27 Protestant faith organizations, including the Episcopal Church,

Presbyterians, and a conglomerate of UCC congregations, have filed another lawsuit against the government, specifically fighting back against a policy that makes immigration raids in churches more common. I am not quoting from the news outlet MSN, 'The lawsuit...claims that ICE raids in houses of worship violate federal religious freedom protections by making it harder for faith groups to minister to immigrants and refugees and live out their religious mission.' In short, it's a religious freedom argument. Well, we'll see what comes out of that...

The seas are really rough right now. Still, we are chosen and called to invite people into God's realm of peace and justice. And here we can take some lessons from 'The Deadliest Catch' - and Simon and his fellow fishermen, for that matter: we have to stick together and help each other out. Especially as church denominations that squabble over so many things, we need to unite, like those 27 quite different church bodies, standing up for what we believe. We have to all lend a hand and do our part as we faithfully and stubbornly serve our neighbors in need. We have to have courage, maybe even to the point of being a little insane. We can't be dismayed when we face backlash or things don't work out the way we want them or expect them to turn out.

Beyond that, we have to faithfully and stubbornly hold fast to what is good, to hold on to truth, to hold on to the values that Jesus teaches us. We are the chosen ones to help bring God's realm about. Like it or not, that's our call today.

So hold on, friends – I have a feeling it's going to be a rocky ride.

Amen