

So, today's gospel is Luke's version of the calling of the disciples. We are at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He's been baptized and blessed by the words "you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" and a dove descending on him. Those gathered were stunned and Jesus goes into the wilderness to contemplate what he is to do next. From there, he heads for Galilee. Whether there was a little buzz that came before him or not, we don't know. We do know that he reads scripture, is proclaimed the Holy One of God by a demon, that he casts out that demon and orders a high fever out of Simon's mother-in-law and finishes up by healing and rebuking demons until daybreak. Now, Galilee is abuzz with reports of his activities.

So much so that he has to teach from a boat to get distance between himself and the crowds. It is Simon's boat he's in so afterwards Jesus tells Simon to go out into the deep water and cast his nets for fish.

Being a fisherman in Jesus' time and place was a middle class occupation, comparable to owning a small store - not glamorous but a steady and respectable living. That day, it is as if a store was open all day, lights on, sandwich board on the sidewalk, and all day, from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. no one comes in. Simon and his crew have been out all night and have caught nothing. What a drag! So it is perhaps only Jesus who could get them to go out again. Simon says what I would have said - okay, but we've been fishing all night and they just aren't biting. I don't know what Simon meant, but I would have been setting up for an "I told you so." when we returned with empty nets.

Maybe Simon wasn't that pessimistic or self-conscious. He followed Jesus' instructions and was barely able to return; the nets were so heavy, filled to overflowing with fish. Simon (who will be called Peter - to orient you) knows whom it is he is in the presence of and declares his unworthiness on his knees. But Jesus calls him and his crew to be his disciples.

We wonder. Was the second trip out to fish a test? Was that why Simon, James and John were called? And still the question - was it the fish that moved them to accept his call? It is a curious thing about when we're open to Jesus' call. I would have been much more apt to go with him when my nets were empty. Reversal of fortune tends to pave a path directly to Jesus. It is when I feel cast adrift, afraid of the future, that I grab Jesus and hold tight. Conversely, it is when my nets are filled to overflowing that I forget my need for Jesus. "It's okay, Jesus. I've got it."

I wonder. Did Jesus shower fish on them to make sure that their choice wasn't out of despair but from their hearts? Was that the test - will you still follow me now that you are standing knee deep in fish? And they do! Amazing - we can't help but wonder what our response would have been.

But perhaps we don't need to wonder; perhaps we have our own experience to inform us. We forget who the disciples were. Once a disciple has been memorialized in scripture, we begin to think of them as extraordinary; we imagine that Jesus saw something special, something holy in them. There's a certain comfort in that - they were different, holy. We're just ordinary. But being a fisherman was the most ordinary of occupations. And maybe Simon was set apart, being the owner of the boat, but these brothers, James and John, are Simon's crew. They are not even distinguished by an entrepreneurial spirit. They are just ordinary. Even their names, James and John - ordinary names - like Is it possible that Jesus sees something in the ordinary? Is it possible that there IS no high bar for discipleship? That even where we are right now - pew or office, home or Whole Foods that Jesus needs us, that we have something that can help transform the world?

Ah, but Simon, James and John, they were in Jesus' presence. In Jesus' aura refusal might have been unimaginable. Jesus' eyes may have been impossible to turn away from. We would have acted as they did in Jesus' actual presence. What would it have been like to feel his power and his love. But I know that were I to know that first hand - it is just a likely that I would have pretended not to hear the call as to say yes to it. Like Simon, I would be very aware of my unworthiness when face to face with Jesus. And that unworthiness would drive me to slip away; fear of relinquishing my life to follow someone else would result. I can't go with you, Jesus. If I do you'll see my real self, my unacceptable self for sure.

Too ordinary, too fearful, too lazy, too stubborn - I could stand here all day listing the reasons we wouldn't follow Jesus. Fear, inadequacies, doubt - these stand between Jesus and ourselves, our call. Even when we aren't aware of it: this is how it happens for me.

Harder than loving Jesus is letting Jesus love us. It is about accepting Jesus' love for your ordinary, flawed, secret self. And at the same time, returning that love in jaw dropping gratitude: I am loved? Completely? The response to that is love, and the response to that is more love. And this is not the love we feel, it is the love we've decided to let guide us. It is the love that is bestowed upon us, lavished so that if we want to take it all in there wouldn't be room in our boat.

It is vital that we respond to Jesus' call; that we fish for people. I know. It is so cringe making to envision ourselves talking faith. But maybe we don't need to talk, maybe we don't need words - maybe what we need is love in the form of fish. Maybe what we need is not what we have to give, but what we can accept. We love God because God loves us. It's a paradox. We have accept that love and at the same time be on our knees pushing it away with our unworthiness. Once we accept that those two things co-exist, it is possible for us to catch fish, to catch people; to want to catch people; to want to use the bait of love, the bait of listening; the bait of acceptance. When we follow Jesus' we will be fishing in the most unexpected places, with the most unexpected people - on street corners and in the corridors of power. Once we know Jesus has heard our story, we can accept, do accept, his call to listen to the story of another's life. Jesus' call isn't an addendum to our life; it isn't a sideline or a Sunday morning thing. Jesus' call is the thing, the only thing. It is everything and everywhere. There is no other way. There is no other hope for the world.