

Epiphany 5C Sermon, St. David's, 2/6/2022 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

We have that line “Do not be afraid” again—something we hear a lot in the Bible that always bears repeating. Do not be afraid, says Jesus, this time followed by “from now on you will be catching people.”

This fish tale shows up in Gospels of Mark and Matthew as well but is told differently here in Luke. In Matthew and Mark, right after being tempted in the desert, Jesus sees these same fishermen casting their nets and says, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately, those accounts say, they followed him.

In Luke, however, Jesus already experienced a bit of fame before calling his first disciples. People in his hometown tried to chase him off a cliff after he taught in the temple, and in Capernaum, he exorcised a demon from a man and healed Simon's mother-in-law. Crowds started following him around, so he boarded Simon's boat and spoke to them from there. Then he told Simon how to fish. Simon immediately caught so many fish that the nets started splitting. Another boat came to help and then both boats started to sink because there were so many fish. Then Simon felt unworthy and called Jesus “Lord.”

Jesus responded, “Don't be afraid. Now you'll catch people.”

In the same story in Mark and Matthew it's a little more mystifying, at least to me, why they would suddenly drop everything and follow a random guy. This time, they've heard and seen about miracles, including this one of abundance. Of so many fish that nets split and boats started to sink.

We read this story in the season of Epiphany partly because it is another call story but also because of Simon Peter's own epiphany when presented with all of these fish. As the nets tore and the boats sank, he fell down at Jesus' knees.

I picture Simon Peter dropping to his own knees. I find kneeling for communion powerful. When I am away for a Sunday and participate in worship instead of lead worship I love kneeling at the communion rail. I miss distributing communion here to people who are kneeling, as we used to do in pre-pandemic times when we didn't have to leave as much distance between people.

Other than here in church, have any of you have ever dropped to your knees like Peter did? I can only remember doing so one time in my life, on September 11th, 2001. had been in a community college Spanish class when the towers and Pentagon were hit, so didn't know about it until an hour and a half later. I drove home, turned on the television, saw the footage of the towers falling, and I fell on my knees. Once I found myself down there I started praying.

For me, it was out of horror; for Peter, awe. A feeling of unworthiness. An epiphany.

Some say that this abundant catch in Luke represents how Simon Peter and the others will fill many people in the future. I love that image and am awed by how many of us Christians now exist following this ministry and early call. But I also think of how Peter needed help with all of those fish, and how in this story Jesus needed, or at least accepted, help when it came to the

crowds who were already forming. He had gone out on the boat to address the crowds. These fisherman became his disciples started to help with those crowds.

We are focusing this year on rebuilding St. David's after the pandemic, and we need your help. We need you to follow the call that brought you to this church. We have lost many people who used to serve on the altar guild or behind the camera or in the choir. We need your help. We ask you to listen to where God is calling you.

Being called is not easy. I spoke about that last week when we heard the story of Jeremiah's call. Today we have Isaiah, but instead of ending the reading with "here I am, send me!" we hear what God told Isaiah next: to go proclaim to the people that they were doomed. And the sequence hymn tells us that Peter, the one who felt so unworthy, was crucified head down. The peace of God, that hymn teaches, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod.

Sometimes we have an idea that our call has only to do with our own self-fulfillment. We are called to do only what we love, and then, if it's what God wants us to be doing, we will be rewarded richly and live happily ever after.

But that wasn't how it worked for Jeremiah or Isaiah or Peter or Mary. But I am confident that, if any of them were up here being interviewed today, they wouldn't say, oh, I wish I turned down that call for something more comfortable.

I love church, and I love this church. We gather here to build one another up, to taste God's kingdom. To marvel in abundance. But Christianity also has a cost. Discipleship has a cost. We aren't just invited to lives of ease and comfort.

You may have considered not coming today, or not tuning into the livestream. I understand. I fantasize about quitting sometimes. I mean, I should be dead. I want to make sure you all understand that. I should not be here today. I had lung cancer, even though I'm not a smoker and never have been. I was being treated for breast cancer when lung cancer was *accidentally* found, and then during a thoracotomy, a big deal surgery, the doctor not only removed a half of my lung with a tumor on it, but the tumor was also on my pulmonary artery.

I shouldn't be here, and so sometimes I think, why am here? I have this bonus time: shouldn't I spend it with family in Arizona, reading and writing and only doing whatever *I* want?

We are all called to serve God, and we called to interdependence, not just self-fulfillment. That doesn't mean that we should endure things we detest. But I love this church, and I believe that I am being called to help rebuild it, and if you are here today, in the room with me now or watching from home, I believe you are being called to do that too.