

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 5:1-11 New Revised Standard Version:

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Pastor Brent also refers to [Isaiah 6:1-8](#), from the International Children's Bible:

SERMON: "What Simon, James and John Needed...What do We Need?"

The Rev. Brent Damrow

In the time of Isaiah, there was plenty of reason for fear. There were economic woes, political strife. People who had long cared for each other, losing their way and no longer following those norms, those rules, those conventions that served especially the least and the vulnerable.

But what was keeping Isaiah back was none of those things out there, but rather was fear. Fear inside. Fear of his own abilities. For you see, before God called Isaiah, God had already sent vision after vision after vision to Isaiah. You see, before Isaiah even answered yes, God had already shown him in detail what was about to happen. Isaiah knew that God was coming. Isaiah knew that leaders were failing. Isaiah knew that there would be pain and heartache. Isaiah knew that the people were floundering. But Isaiah also knew in those visions that God was going to redeem, that God was going to give hope. That this was not a dead end, but someday a new beginning would come. And since God had already told Isaiah that, Isaiah should have known that it didn't matter what his lips did. For God would make it work. And yet, Isaiah was afraid.

In the time of Simon -- the one who we know as Peter, in the time of James and John who appear in this story, there was plenty of reason for fear. Their lands were occupied. There were no fish to be found. The people were so full of expectation and hope, and yet a dead end after dead end after dead end seemed to be coming. And the grip of Rome seemed to be getting firmer and firmer.

In this amazing story for today, the fishermen had been out all night. Simon was no slouch at fishing. He knew exactly where to go. He knew which waters held the fish. At least the shallow ones, because there he could see, there he could navigate, there he knew. In those shallow waters

that were so predictable, Simon was the expert. In our story for today, Simon and his crew had been out fishing and they caught absolutely nothing. Simon was smart enough to know that sometimes you've just got to call it a day.

For fishermen, their nets would have been among their most prized possessions. When they got back to shore, it wasn't just a matter of throwing them in a corner. It was a matter of cleaning them, it was a matter of folding them, it was a matter of storing them, to make sure they lasted as long as possible. And so, while Jesus was out there teaching those crowds, Peter was there putting away those nets, and going through all the work to do so. And yet, after overhearing Jesus teaching there on the shore, after being in the presence of Jesus, when Jesus said we're going back out again, Simon Peter said okay.

But there's an interesting detail of this story, both where Simon's fear was and what broke it. Simon knew all the rituals and routines. He knew how to make it work. If problem A came, he had solution A. If problem B came, he had solution B. But Jesus said to take him out into the deep waters. Deep waters in the Bible were places of chaos and mystery, places where things get stirred up a little bit, places beyond which Peter could have reliably said, oh you're going to find fish here. And suddenly out in those waters beyond his knowledge, beyond his gifts which were formidable, suddenly the harvest was abundant. Suddenly all those things Peter was afraid of didn't matter.

But we see what Peter was really afraid of. Face to face with Christ, he was afraid he didn't measure up. He fell down at Jesus' feet. He said I'm scared. I'm scared. You are too pure. I am not worthy. And Jesus said, Peter, Peter, don't fear, just come with me, and you will start catching even more than fish. And that fear went away, at least for then.

Friends, in these times that we have, right now there are plenty of reasons to fear. There are troops massing on borders. There is dysfunction in our government that we haven't seen, at least in my memory. And then there is this pandemic.

If this pandemic wasn't here, this room would be full. If this pandemic wasn't here, our lives would be different. If this pandemic wasn't here, I don't know, but we're going to have to figure it out. Because soon we're going to live into it, soon we're going to have to find a new beginning. Because we have discovered these ways to cope, we've discovered these ways to live, we've discovered these ways to be. And yet, they work for the moment, but can anybody imagine doing this forever? I hope not.

But the thing that's different about coming out of a pandemic than going into one, is going into one you get clear answers. Shut down, go home, stay away. Whatever you do, don't breathe. Spring is coming. Easter is coming. And we need to breathe. And so we're going to need to let go of our fear, so that we might live into the new beginning that God is placing before us. We're going to need to figure out a way, like Isaiah did, like Peter did, to go out there and be God's disciples in the world. And there are things I know that make me nervous about doing that. Are there for you?

You see, in the gospel of Luke and the corresponding book of Acts, discipleship is on front and center display. What does it mean to be a disciple? You know, as I researched for this sermon and as I thought about Peter and the disciples, it occurred to me that as they went out, and whatever they did while Jesus was still with them, it almost invariably was *for* something. It wasn't against something. It wasn't to critique something. It wasn't to label somebody a "them." It wasn't to hide. Instead, they stood *for* something. They proclaimed that the Kingdom of God had drawn near, and they wanted everyone to come and feel the joy. That there was healing and wholeness. Discipleship in the time of Luke was first and foremost to accept who Jesus was, as the One who brought the Kingdom of God near. As we talked about last week, the inherent response then is to go out and do what we can to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is already here, even if not quite as full as it will someday be.

Think about what the disciples did. They fed thousands. They brought the children. They met those who were sick and lame. Always *for* something. And even in the book of Acts, really the only time that the disciples challenged things was when truth was not being told. They stood up and testified: You need to know the truth. They went on always trying to be *for* something.

As we spend this year in Luke, the fundamental question that's on display is: Will we be like those disciples? Are we ready to accept God's invitation with this new beginning that I am convinced is around the corner, this new beginning that will be complicated and messy, and yet that we must be ready for. Are we ready, like Peter was, to simply listen to Jesus say Do not fear, and then follow along?

I don't know if you remember, but almost two full years ago, the very first words out of my mouth when we gathered for worship was the same thing Jesus said to Peter. When we were facing this pandemic at the beginning, the very first words we uttered as a church were the words of angels: Do not fear. And so as we get ready to go out into the world, we must not fear. We must not fear that somehow we aren't good enough, bright enough, articulate enough, or strong enough. Because together I know that we are. We don't have to worry about whether we're up to it, because God through the prophet Isaiah said then and says now, Behold, there is a new beginning. I will make everything new. And the question is will you and I be ready to drop our fear or anything that holds us back, so that we can be disciples and go out there and be *for* something, for the inbreaking of God's Kingdom, even here and now?

We will need to let go of some things that we have gotten used to. We will need to let go of some measures that made us safe and made us feel safe. And we will need to let go of a whole bunch of righteous indignation at people on all sides have had about who is doing what right, and who is doing what wrong. Instead, we'll simply need to be together.

And you know what? When this pandemic is over, I'm not going to stop saying Do not fear, because the reality is we will get afraid again. But it cannot stop us. For you know what? Did Peter get afraid again? Peter got very afraid. He followed Jesus for years. And then that night, that night that we remember happened around this very communion table, Peter was scared out of his wits. Do you remember? Three times he said I don't know that Jesus guy. Nope, don't know him. Nope, that's not me. Nope, you've got the wrong guy. And then do you remember, it would be after the resurrection where three times Jesus would ask Peter if he loved him. And

Peter said yes. And Jesus said, Well then, go and do what you've been doing. Go and feed my sheep. Peter, don't be afraid. You've got this.

Friends, we have been a work-in-progress church for a long time, preparing for just this moment. New beginnings waiting to spring forth. And I don't have all the answers. None of us do. But together, we will find some. And we will find them a whole lot better if we are like Isaiah and we trust in God. We will find them a whole lot better if we are like Peter and remember that Jesus is whispering even now: Do not fear.

I do not know what's holding you back. I do not know what's holding *us* back from being the church that this new beginning demands. But you know what I have? I have faith. Faith, yes, in you. Faith, yes, in us. But most of all, faith in the One who makes everything possible.

Friends, our new beginning is here. Let us rise, and let us sing.