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I grew up in cabin country of Northwest Wisconsin, and everyone had at least one fishing story to tell. My favorite would probably be the one about my Father...

The thing everyone needs to know about fishing tales is that they say more about the fisherman than they say about the fish.

let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Simon had been fishing all night with no success, then working from the early morning hours cleaning his nets. Most likely he was exhausted and looking forward to going home and getting some sleep. So it must have seemed a bit of an imposition when Jesus got into Simon's boat and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Nevertheless, Simon did what Jesus asked.

Luke does not tell us what Jesus taught the crowds that morning. The focus is on what follows. Jesus tells Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon obviously believes this will be a futile exercise. He is the professional fisherman, after all. We can almost hear the exasperation in his voice when he responds, "Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing." But then he continues; "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets".

We know what happens next -- nets so full of fish that they begin to break, boats so full of fish that they begin to sink. Seeing what is happening, Simon is overwhelmed with fear and wonder, sensing that he is in the presence of divine power. He responds by falling down at Jesus' knees and begging him, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Simon is caught by surprise. In the midst of his ordinary daily grind, and in fact, after a particularly lousy night at work, he is encountered by one who changes everything.

Amazed by the power of God displayed in the abundant catch of fish, Simon is immediately aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness. He sees the overwhelming disparity between God's power manifest in Jesus and his own mortal, compromised life.

Jesus responds to Simon by saying, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people". The Greek word for "catching" used here (*zogron*) is rare in the New Testament, but means "to catch alive." Of course, fishing with nets was a matter of catching fish alive, but those live fish would soon be dead. Here Jesus calls Simon and his partners to a new vocation of catching people so that they might live, a life-giving vocation of being caught up in God's mission of salvation for all.

Although they have just brought in the greatest catch of their fishing careers, Simon Peter, James, and John leave those boatloads of fish behind and follow Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus has completely reoriented their lives.

This text offers rich possibilities for reflecting on how God calls ordinary people to discipleship and mission. After all, there is nothing the slightest bit extraordinary about Simon Peter and his fishing partners. They are simple fishermen, and they are simply doing what they did every day. They are minding their own business, cleaning their nets after a long, particularly discouraging night of work, when Jesus comes along, enters into their utterly normal, mundane lives and changes everything.

Jesus calls Simon and his partners as they are. Simon is acutely aware of his unworthiness, but Jesus is not put off by this in the slightest. Jesus does not ask Simon to get his act together, his resume prepared, and then come back for an interview. Rather, Jesus encounters him as he is, tells him not to be afraid, and calls him to a new mission of catching people.

Throughout Scripture we see that human sin, failure, and inadequacy are no obstacles to God's call. God calls imperfect people to do God's work, people who are aware of their unworthiness and are often doubting and resistant to God's call. God doesn't wait

for them to shape up. God calls them as they are and then works on shaping them into faithful servants.

Simon Peter's resistance to Jesus stems not only from his sense of unworthiness. He initially protests Jesus' instructions to go out into the deep waters and let down the nets because he is convinced that the fish are not biting. They have worked all night and caught nothing. We can hardly blame him for his skepticism.

How often do we resist Jesus' claim on our lives because what he is calling us to do seems too crazy, too impractical? How often do we avoid putting out into the deep waters of following and bearing witness to Jesus because we are convinced that we will not see any results? What might it mean for us to go deep-sea fishing with Jesus -- to trust and follow him outside our comfort zones, to let go of our certainties, to have our lives radically reoriented?

For most of us, this will not mean leaving our current professions behind (although we cannot rule out that possibility). We all are called by virtue of our baptism to participate in God's mission to the world in Jesus Christ. We all are called daily to reorient our priorities to align with God's priorities, to use the gifts God has given us in service to others, to share the good news of Christ in word and deed.

Jesus' mission does not wait until we think we are ready. The need for the gospel in this broken world is far too urgent. We are called right now -- even in spite of our frailty, failures, and doubts, even in the midst of our ordinary, busy, complicated lives. Jesus' word to Simon Peter is also a word to us: "Do not be afraid." This is Jesus' mission, and we trust that he will keep working with us and through us, "catching" others as he has caught us -- in the deep, wide net of God's mercy and love. We trust, finally, that the catch is in God's hands, and that God's desire is for the nets to be bursting and the boats full.

There is one more thing I want to share about Peter's response to this miraculous catch of fish. Such a response may seem odd to our modern ears, but it is a natural and

appropriate response to divine presence in the ancient world. In the tradition of the Hebrew Bible describing faith as “fear of the Lord,” Simon and his partners are astonished/afraid. So, the one who will come to be called “Rock” falls to his knees, trembles, and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!". It is a moment of true humility.

Congregations and individuals usually think of confession of sin as being offered to God in order to receive grace. This story offers a counter view. Upon receiving grace from Jesus in the form of a catch of fish he could not accomplish on his own, Simon confesses his sinfulness. Instead of trying to persuade God to address the fact that we are woefully and painfully mired in the human condition, when we realize God has addressed our condition we are able to confess where we are mired.

It is at this moment -- this very moment following Jesus’s teaching and miraculous catch of fish in which Simon names his unworthiness to even be in Jesus’ presence -- that Jesus calls him to begin catching people instead of fish.

In today’s world, we often think and speak of contributions we make to the ministry of the church in terms of our innate talents. We connect people with the music or finance ministries of the church because they have exhibited gifts in those areas. There is, of course, wisdom in operating in this fashion.

And Luke looks at calling from a very different angle. As Peter himself acknowledges in this scene (verse 5), he and his partners are failures at their job. They have fished all night and have caught “nothing.” The very reason Jesus can commandeer Simon’s boat is because there are no fish in it -- plenty of seat room available! Jesus does not call these men because they have exhibited gifts and graces for apostleship (or even for fishing). Jesus calls them after he has shown that he can catch fish through them when they cannot do so on their own. Simon is not called to “catch people” (verse 10) because he will be good at it, but because Jesus can do it through him.

And so it is with us. The moment when we humbly recognize that we have nothing worthy to bring into Christ's presence for the ministry of the church may be the very moment when Christ begins to use us in ways we never could have imagined.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus of fisher folk,

You taught your disciples to cast a wide net -- not for fish, but for people. Teach us the fishing craft. Make our fingers nimble so we may handle hearts and hands gently; make our minds quiet and patient while we wait for those who are not yet ready to receive you; and make our hearts hungry for your word, for the sake of the one who has captured our hearts already, Jesus Christ. Amen.