

“Jesus’ Mission of Calling”
Isaiah 61:1-8
Luke 5:1-11
February 4, 2007

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Introduction to Scripture

For the last few weeks, we have been exploring Jesus’ mission. We began with the premise that each of us has a mission in life. Our particular mission – our calling, if you will – depends on the unique combination of gifts that make us who we are. Each of us has own peculiar amalgam of personality, accomplishments, and opportunities out of which our personal mission emerges. Identifying our gifts is a key component in figuring out how to spend ourselves. But as Christians, we also recognize a higher calling for our gifts. As Christians, we also seek *God’s purposes, God’s agenda* for our lives. To discover what that purpose and agenda is, we begin by looking at Jesus’ own mission and following his example. *Imitatio Christi*, the ancients called it: the imitation of Christ.

We’re in our fourth and final week focusing on Jesus’ mission, so allow me to recap. We have been concentrating on Jesus’ inaugural ministries which lay out his core mission. First we saw in Luke’s gospel that Jesus’ opening mission is to proclaim the good news to his home town ... a message of compassion and justice. They welcome his message until Jesus tells them that it isn’t only for them; God’s compassion and justice is meant for outsiders and even the enemy, too. This is the message we are called to proclaim with Christ; even when it is an unwelcome word.

Next we explored Jesus’ second inaugural mission: his mission of healing. We learned that healing includes rebuke -- rebuke of whatever is sick or twisted in our life. We learned that healing is often painful, but not to cause us more harm; rather it leads to health. And we learned that healing is not merely for relief *from* suffering but also for freedom *to* serve. We looked at how this healing takes place in our individual lives, as well as in our life as a *congregation*, and the opportunity before us as a people healed by Christ’s mercy – as a healed people called to extend Christ’s healing to those who still await wholeness.

Last week we turned to the gospel of John to find Jesus' third initial mission: his mission of transformation. Just as Jesus transformed the water into wine at the wedding at Cana, so he continues to create abundant joy and hope in the world. He takes our ordinary gifts – ordinary water poured into ordinary jars – and transforms them into extraordinary grace. When we offer our time, our efforts, our kindness, our treasure, Jesus transforms them into life-giving gifts for an empty and suffering world.

Today, in our final sermon in this series, we return to the gospel of Luke to discern Jesus' fourth inaugural mission: his mission of calling. As we have throughout this series, I invite you to turn to your Bible and follow along.

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Jesus is teaching at the Sea of Galilee, and the crowds are pressing in, and there's no way he can speak to them from the center of the throng. He sees a boat in the shallow waters of the shore – it belongs to Simon who is there, mending his nets. Now Simon is no stranger to him; Jesus has already been a guest in Simon's home; indeed, Simon's mother-in-law was healed of her fever by Jesus' own hand. So Jesus sees Simon's boat at the shore, gets in, and picks up where he left off teaching the crowds. But when the lesson is over, instead of getting out of the boat, Jesus calls to Simon to let out into the deeper waters to catch some fish. It seems like a ridiculous suggestion; they'd been fishing all night and they didn't catch a thing, a point that Simon doesn't hesitate to point out to the Good Teacher. But Simon does what Jesus tells him to. They push out farther and put their nets in. And this time – this time they pull in so much it breaks their nets; this time they catch so much that the weight of it sinks their boats. They have never seen anything remotely like this. Tons of fish, oceans of fish, more fish than anyone had ever imagined. That's why Simon Peter falls on his face in awe. And it's why these fishermen are prepared to leave *everything* – even this haul of a lifetime – to leave everything behind follow Jesus ... to leave their whole livelihood behind to fish with Jesus, to fish for people.

And so it was that Jesus called his first disciples to himself, so that through them many others might be called as well ... so that the world might find life, and find it abundantly. In this final Sunday when we consider the mission of Jesus, and our mission in turn to follow him, let's look closely at this Scripture to see what it might inspire in us.

First, notice how this calling begins: Jesus gets into Simon Peter's boat. Now that may seem like a little thing, a minor aside, but I'm struck that this is how our calling always begins. Jesus doesn't ask us to get into *his* boat; instead, Jesus gets into *ours*. Jesus finds us where we are – in our work, in our home, in wherever our daily life takes us. Jesus finds us where we are, and asks to enter in.

Now what I've found is that for many of us, we are absolutely fine letting Jesus into certain corners of our lives: our personal lives, and our family life. Our prayer life, certainly, and especially our sincere desire for healing for the people we love. But if we're honest with ourselves, most of us have to admit that there are also areas where we're less eager to have Jesus meddling ... or where it's simply hard for us to figure out exactly what Jesus has to do with them. Our political decisions, for example; our investments and expenses; our business dealings; our consumption. It's not a conscious decision so much as it is a default mode. We are absolutely convinced that Jesus is Lord of our personal lives ... we just haven't clearly figured out what it means for him to be Lord of our public and professional lives. But just as Jesus entered into Simon's *house* in the Scripture we read two weeks ago, Jesus also enters Simon's *boat* – his commercial enterprise, his business – in this Scripture passage today. And it is with us: Jesus wants to come in not only in our homes, but also in the midst of our secular business and commerce. Jesus wants to come in ... to come in and use them for his higher purposes.

How might that look for us? I'm struck first by the way Jesus needed Simon's *boat* to do his teaching. So it is with us. Jesus may have need of our offices or boardrooms or volunteer organizations to do his work. He might need that platform to do more teaching— some teaching about ethics, for example, or some coaching about forgiveness, or some instruction about

perspective or greed. Whether or not Jesus' name even comes up, his teaching and values can have an enormous impact in the halls of influence in which we are privileged to walk. Or he might need that platform to do more healing – the healing of an addiction or a marriage threatened by adultery; the healing of a mindset of entitlement, or rapaciousness towards the environment. Or Jesus might just need our secular, public lives for the purpose of transformation: to do his work of creating abundant life. He may have need of our ordinary work, our ordinary financial transactions, our ordinary board-work – he may have need of them to bring joy and hope and fullness of life into a darkened corner of the world. We never know when he might have need of our “boat” – have need of our commercial and secular enterprises.

Second, I'm also struck by the way Jesus calls Simon Peter to follow him. Jesus calls Simon to fish for people. Jesus could have called Simon to shepherd people; he could have called Simon to be a priest for people; he could have called Simon to be a soldier for people; he could have called Simon to be a homemaker for people. Jesus could have used any number of images at his disposal. But Simon is a *fisherman*. Fishing is what he knows and what he's good at. So Jesus calls Simon to *continue* to be a fisherman; the only change is what he will be fishing for.

And that too is the way it is with us. Jesus doesn't ask us to be somebody we're not. Jesus calls on who we really are -- our regular, ordinary skills and work and experience – Jesus calls on who we really are to follow him. To the fisherman he says, from now on it is people you will catch. To the manufacturer he says, from now on, it is people you will build up, and justice you will make. To the homemaker he says, from now on it is the lost you will welcome home, and the hospitality of Christ you will extend. To the physicians he says, from now on it is the broken-hearted you will heal, and the impoverished that you'll mend. To the students he says, from now on it is the Word of God you will study, and the ways of grace you will learn. To the investors and venture capitalists he says, from now on it is my people you will invest in, and the poor you will bring opportunity and hope. Be who you are, do what you do, Jesus says; but follow me. Follow me, and do everything now for me and my beloved people. Allow me to reach people through you.

One final word ... one final word about the work we do here. Here, in this church, in some ways we're still fishing. It is an ancient symbol of faith – from the very first followers of Jesus – that the church is still thought of as a ship. The word nave, the section of the church that holds the pews – the word nave is from the Latin *navis*, which means literally “ship.” And the shape of the nave, in all but the most modern buildings, the shape of the nave is an upside down ship. It is a place of refuge and safety in our storm-tossed darkness; it is a place of gathering abundance in the Lord's strong hands; it is a place of joyful service to the Lord's good will. And so it is we come here still, to this ship of grace. And so it is we start here in our ministry, as Simon Peter and his comrades did so many years ago. Putting this boat in Christ's service; putting our gifts to his use.

You have noticed that we have our nets up here today, and in the Narthex as you came in. There are baskets under the nets, baskets to gather the gifts that we bring. Inside your bulletin you will find two ways to join in service. First, you will find a Ministry Opportunities checklist. This is offered by the Board of Deacons to encourage your work for the Lord in this place. Our hope is that each one of you will find one small way to offer your gifts in service to those in need. Second, you will find a sheet called “Faith First.” This is offered by the Adult Education Committee to encourage your spiritual involvement and growth. There are three main events coming up this month and throughout the Spring; our hope is that everyone will find *at least* one opportunity to grow in faith through these special offerings. I invite you to take some time during the offering, look through these two inserts, and then, following worship, to place your completed forms in the baskets by the nets. If you aren't ready to commit yet, not to worry; we welcome your gifts whenever you are ready to give them. And whatever we're ready to give – whatever we're ready to offer – Jesus will use what we have, I guarantee it. He'll use it, and grow it abundantly.

As for me, this is what I'm thinking. Once, when Jesus was standing by Lake Michigan, he saw a boat there on the corner of Deerpath and Sheridan Roads. And he got into that boat – our boat -- and he asked us to put out just a little way from the steadiness of shore. So we did.

And now, when Jesus is done teaching, he's telling us to go to the deep waters, and to throw in our nets to fish. I think that's what he's asking us to do now. We may have tried it before; we may not have even caught a thing. But I think that we're ready to trust him. I think we're ready to let down our nets. Let's see what he has in store for us to catch, shall we? Amen.