

## Into the Deep (Luke 5:1-11)

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The Fifth Sunday of Epiphany (Luke 5:1-11; Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13); Psalm 138; I Corinthians 15:1-11)  
February 6, 2022

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### Luke 5:1-11, NRSV

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out ... and were washing their nets. He 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So, 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and 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." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*



There's an old saying that says, "Life is what happens when you're making other plans." We make our plans, set our goals, give ourselves away dreaming our dreams, and that gives us a sense of direction. That sense of direction helps us define who we are. But then things happen ... a flood, a fire, a shadow on an X-ray, a reduction in the work force, bad grades, a broken relationship ... and suddenly we realize whatever control we thought we had, was no more than an illusion.

Sometimes the interruption comes from within ... We feel angry and cheated because our lives are not turning out like we supposed or dreamed they would turn out. We may discover that when our early dreams of life get bogged down or interrupted, there's a loss experienced as disorientation or the death of a previous dream. It can be frightening and in the end we can become rigid and unyielding.

But in the middle of it all, there's always the chance for rebirth and a deeper experience with

God. God is always with us through the reorienting times in our lives and may even be the catalyst behind our reorientation.

Someone once wrote: "Sometimes the Lord stills the storm, and sometimes the Lord is the storm itself." Knowing the difference is a matter of faith and perspective. It is a way of believing that helps put order into our lives.

Simon Peter was the everyman of his day. He was a fisherman. He got up early (long before daylight) in order to get his boat ready to set sail. After a long day with the nets and the stinking fish he might get together with the other fishermen to let off steam by drinking, knocking a few heads together, and telling loud stories to one another.

Jesus taught the people while sitting in Peter's boat just offshore, and after his lesson was over (we don't even know what Jesus taught them), he told Peter to push out to the deeper water and drop the nets. Then Peter realized what was happening: It struck him as hard as anything had ever struck him. He was caught in the presence of God just being with Jesus. He understood how small he was and how great Jesus was and said the only thing he could mutter: *"Go away, I am a sinful man."*

Do you see what happened? It was a divine interruption in the mundane events of life, totally unpredictable and not something you can prepare for.

Dr. James Loder was a theology professor at Princeton Seminary and was involved in a serious car accident on the side of the road where he was assisting a stranded traveler when an eighteen-wheeler plowed through his car parked on the side of the road crushing him as it rolled over him. So significant was this experience, Loder labeled it, "a transforming moment." In that extraordinary moment, he experienced God.<sup>1</sup>

In a transforming moment, whether one is a person of faith or not, there is a sense of the presence of the Divine. There may be the conviction of our inadequacy. Isaiah blurted out, *"Woe is me for I am a sinner,"* at his surprising encounter with God in the temple. Simon Peter said the same thing. Saul of Tarsus said it later when he was knocked off his burro on his way to Damascus. In such an extraordinary moment, it's the sudden realization we stand before God. We are swallowed up in the amazing nearness of God and also able to see with clarity the immensity of God. What follows naturally is a feeling of inadequacy. Lastly, there is the sense of resignation and cooperation. One may say, "I will do whatever God asks of me." That is the only response necessary. It's simple: just do what God asks you to do.

It's then we realize God is the interruption, calling you to something better, calling you to an adventure instead of a routine, calling you to service instead of self, calling you to courage

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment, Understanding Convictional Experiences*, New York NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981

instead of comfort. And in those moments of interruption, you always have a choice. You can cling to the old and hope the crisis will pass so you can get back to your plans. Or you can let go and pursue God's path to the new. It's the way of faith.

It's keeping your eyes and ears open for the new moment of God's interruption where you learn to be spontaneous in playful, joyful response to God. You might learn to let go of having to control everything. You might accept the interruptions as opportunities to give or receive grace. You might even discover the God who is always with you, even in the interruptions, and especially in the places where things don't go your way. That's when things can instead go God's way, if you are going with God to the depths where beneath the surface there's an undiscovered world. We only get there by listening to God and paying attention with the willingness to follow God

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