

Belief + Trust = Faith
Luke 5:1-11
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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Today's gospel reading is familiar to anybody who knows anything about Jesus. On the surface it seems to be about Jesus mesmerizing three fishermen before making them an offer they couldn't refuse, an exciting and successful future. But putting this isolated story in the context of the complete gospel both reaffirms a fact of life and asks a hard question. The fact of life: success comes at a high price. The question: Are you willing to pay it?

TV infomercials always promise success. You can lose weight, tone your body or make extra income all in the privacy of your own home. You then see images and hear testimonies manipulating you into buying whatever they're selling. Lots of promises are made but rarely do they tell you about the high price in time, energy and money you'll have to pay to achieve the success you crave.

A case can be made this is exactly what happened when Simon Peter and his business partners James and John were absolutely overwhelmed by Jesus' fish catching miracle and then promised they could be catching people just as easily and quickly. So, off they went, leaving their boats and nets behind forever.

How many times have you heard and read this story? You've probably even seen it portrayed in movies and on T.V. But today, try to hear this story again for the first time and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh perspective so this story can inform and empower your faith.

Taking into consideration everything I just said let's take a new look at this story so it can speak to us loud and clear in a new way.

Luke tells us in the previous chapter Jesus' ministry was already going full throttle. After being rejected by his neighbors in Nazareth, because as Jesus explained prophets are never welcomed in their hometown, Jesus began preaching and healing in the neighboring village of Capernaum where he wasn't only welcomed, but also invited to stay. But Jesus declined. "I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to other cities also for I was sent for this purpose." Jesus was on the move.

But there's one particular healing story highlighted in chapter four by Luke we need to know about before reviewing Jesus' encounter with our three fishermen. In 4:38 we read, "After leaving the synagogue Jesus entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever...he stood

over her and rebuked the fever and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.” (Luke 4:38-39)

Apparently, before the fishing incident Simon Peter already had a relationship with Jesus. It's even likely Peter, James and John not only heard Jesus preach but also had extensive conversations with him about the coming Kingdom of God and their role in bringing it about. It's also probable these conversations were job interviews as Jesus took his measure of these ordinary men who in time would be called upon to do extraordinary things.

So don't think it was just the overwhelming catch of fish that convinced Simon Peter, James and John. You know they had to know what they were getting into before they took the first step and made the hard decision to leave everything behind, their careers, their families, their predictable way of life. Then why did they do it, knowing at least on some level, they'd be expected to make sacrifices and take risks as Jesus led them into uncharted territory? Could it be a sense of adventure? Or was it something more, the belief and hope that God was about to bring something new and so wonderful into the world they were willing to give their lives to make it happen.

Giuseppe Garibaldi, the George Washington of modern Italy famously declared to his newest recruits, “I offer neither pay, quarters or food. I do promise hunger, thirst, forced marches and death. Let him who loves liberty with his heart, not just his lips, follow me.”

David Livingstone, the great 19th century missionary to Africa, received a letter from a young man in London, promising he'd come to work with him if there was a good road to his outpost. Livingstone wrote back, “I don't want men who'd come only if there's a good road. I need men who'll still come if there's no road at all.”

Of course, being forewarned about the sacrifices needed to make success possible is entirely different from actually experiencing first hand the high cost of discipleship. I have no doubt at the very beginning Jesus warned Peter, James and John the going would get rough and the closer they got to Good Friday Jesus was very honest about the need for self-denial and servant hood but until they were in the thick of it, especially on Good Friday, they could never have imagined before hand how hard and costly it would be.

Now, having said all this about Jesus, Peter, James and John, what does all this have to do with Jesus, you and me?

The obvious answer is everything. Like Peter, James and John, Jesus calls us to a deeper faith and practice. What does that mean?

Let's begin by saying what it doesn't mean. There are two separate but equal components of faith. The first is accepting the reality of God and accepting Christ and his message as truth.

I was raised in the Church, and at an early age I received a precious gift, the ability to believe. I was taught and by God's grace always accepted as true the teachings of the Christian faith. As a teenager I could recite the catechism, name and describe the major Christian doctrines and tell you the story of Jesus. I never doubted any of it was true. But that's where my faith stopped. I believed in God, but I couldn't or wouldn't reorient my life around it.

It wasn't until my sophomore year in college I received a second precious gift: the ability to not only believe but also to trust. It's one thing to say "I believe what you say," it's another thing to say "I totally trust you."

Both components, belief and trust, are essential, you can't have one without the other, otherwise you'll never be able to give yourself to Christ and then answer the call to endure "hunger, thirst, death and forced marches...to where there's no road at all." Belief and trust enter into a powerful combination that empowers ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Peter demonstrated this combination in today's Gospel reading. After being out on the lake all night without catching any fish Peter, James and John come to shore where Jesus positioned himself on a boat floating near the shore while teaching the crowds. Something tells me this wasn't a coincidence. Jesus knew this was their usual place to "put in," so he was waiting for them.

When the word spread the boats came back empty Jesus decided to make this a teaching moment and asked Peter to set out again. No doubt Peter knew and respected Jesus, why else would he call Jesus Master and agree to go out despite his professional judgment? Somehow Peter both believed and trusted Jesus.

If Jesus was testing Peter's ability to believe and trust, Peter passed with flying colors and was handsomely rewarded with more fish than he knew what to do with. But Peter's record breaking catch of fish which would surely fetch a lot of money apparently wasn't important any more because when Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men and women," the three fishermen suddenly became disciples as they left it all behind to follow Jesus.

Sometime sooner than later God will call you to do something rather extraordinary for Christ and his Kingdom. It may be something little or something big, short term or long term. It could be something enjoyable and exciting or it could be emotionally draining and exceptionally difficult. This calling might come to you through the Church, more likely in your work place or neighborhood.

If and when you hear God calling you to exercise your discipleship, be assured God will supply the belief and trust you need at that moment to go out into the deep waters where you'll have to trust your life and calling completely to Christ.

May God bless and keep you and give you the faith to go where there's no road at all for Christ and his Kingdom.