

The Church of the Pilgrimage  
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### Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

### **Net Worth**

On our tour of the Holy Land last October when I first learned we were headed to the Church of Peter's Primacy, I thought Oh really? *Peter's Primacy* The same Peter who always seemed to be getting it wrong, The Peter who wanted to sit at Jesus right hand in glory, The Peter who wanted to build booths in the midst of Transfiguration mystery, The Peter who denied Jesus three times while the cock crowed?

Call me a curmudgeonly Protestant, but really, I thought it was about *Jesus...* what is this "Peter Primacy" stuff?

I hadn't expected to be so moved. First, there was the Sea of Galilee itself. The water shimmered as we made our way down to it, stepping along heart shaped rocks. The seaside chapel itself was simple, beautiful, hewn of rock and standing like a beacon by the water's edge. Looking out at the water, you could imagine fishing boats at the shoreline. You could imagine tired fishermen washing out their nets, a night gone by with little to show for it. You could imagine Jesus teaching from a boat, and then the fishermen being told to push out to deep water. You could imagine the surprise when the fish haul was so overwhelmingly large, *two* boats were strained to pull it in.

Then there was the sculpture, the one you see on our bulletin cover today. Set off to the side, in a kind of tree lined terrace, it captures the moment of Peter falling to his knees after the big fish haul. Peter confessing his humanity, his limitations, All right his *sinfulness*. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" Peter says. This was the part of the story I had not thought so much about.

This is the part of the story I want to think about together with you today. At first, it may sound odd telling the man who has just led you -- a weary fisherman, to the biggest catch you've ever seen -- it may sound odd telling that man to Go Away. It sounds decidedly ungrateful in fact if you just read the words on the page. But Peter must have said those words with a tremble in his voice. He knew, like Isaiah in the temple, that he was not in ordinary time. He knew, like Isaiah before him, that he was in a holy moment. He was in awe and wonder, and, like the shepherds who first received news of Christ's birth, he was afraid.

Early this week I was feeling really torn. I wanted to march in the March for Women held yesterday. My son was coming to visit with his girlfriend, and the three of us planned to march in Boston together. But then a dear friend's mother died and her funeral was scheduled yesterday. There would be other women to show up to raise concerns, to be in solidarity, but my friend needed me, needed us, to be there. And then my father had his fall early in the week, and this week there was lots and lots of time spent in the hospital. And as hard as it was, it was also holy time. It is not every week that you hang out in a hospital, a place of life and death. It is not every week that you have to be an advocate for someone you love. And it is not every week that you offer your hugs, your words, your presence to someone who is mourning. Sometimes we think we need to be one place, and the Spirit simply leads us some place else.

Where was the last place you found yourself knowing you were on holy ground? Was it yesterday, as you marched with so many others? Was it the day a baby, or grandbaby, was first placed in your arms? Was it a day when you knew you'd met someone who would possibly change your life? Was it a time when you felt someone giving you that great gift of listening well? Were you by a hospital bed, holding someone's hand? When was the last time you found yourself awestruck or feeling like you were right at that moment just exactly where you needed to be?

Peter's words, Peter falling to his knees, his response to Jesus remind me too of something the poet Annie Dillard said about people in churches:

*"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. "*  
(Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*)

Some years ago, twenty some, I met a man who I had up until then only spoken to on the phone. When I met him, when the voice came together with a person, I actually felt a little afraid.

There was something in me saying this person could change your life. It wasn't Jesus I met. It was my husband, Mike. I have felt a similar feeling of awe about ministry. These days are not ordinary days. I find myself feeling a little frightened and, at the same time, emboldened, and deeply curious about what it is going to mean to be a person of faith leading a community of faith in times like these. I think we will not remain the same. I think we will be challenged, and we will be changed.

Peter falling to his knees, Peter confessing his sinfulness speaks to this. Peter reminds us that we do not enter holy moments or holy times and exit them unchanged. Peter will not stay on his knees. He will get up and follow Jesus. He will become if not a perfect disciple, one of the first disciples. And his life from this moment on will be forever changed.

If you look again at the photo of the sculpture, you will see that the artist has portrayed Jesus holding his hand out, as if blessing Peter, and maybe too reassuring him. "Do not be afraid" Jesus says. Jesus is saying I am not concerned with your worthiness, or your confessed lack thereof. I want you. I am calling you. Follow me. "But I'm unworthy" Peter says. "Come anyway" Jesus says.

And what about what Jesus says *next*? The "I will make you fish for people" thing? That has always bothered me a bit, perhaps because I am an image person, and those words immediately make me think of fish I watched my brothers catch, fish that lay upon the dock or the sand gasping for breath. And the drag nets my cousin and I would use in the creek by Lake Erie when we'd take the shiny silver minnows and throw them back in the water before they expired in our hands. Perhaps something is lost in translation. A commentator suggests Jesus is saying to Peter that he will be "taking" or "saving *men and women alive*" which is a very different image from catching them as if they are food to be consumed.

Listen to what the commentator says: "the kingdom of God requires not dead fish, but human beings fully alive – not creatures writhing in the last gasps before death, but people living the life of the good news in all its fullness." *Feasting on the Word*, page 335.

How is Jesus asking us to get up, rise from our knees, leaving behind our fears of our own inadequacy or our own future or our church's ultimate survival? How is Jesus asking us to engage with the world out there, so that people might become fully alive, living the life of the good news in all its fullness?

Last night my son's girlfriend Megan, who asks very good questions asked me what I liked the most about ministry, what moments spoke to me the most. I said something, I think, about seeing people find themselves in working together on things that matter. I might have said it this way: over and over, ministry brings opportunities to see people come fully alive.

This hand that is hovering over Peter's head -- might it be hovering too over our heads *at this particular time* asking us to stand up to rise to help make Jesus real for others (and for ourselves) in ways that are true and compelling?

"Do not be afraid" Jesus says.

Amen.