

Government Street Presbyterian Church
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Luke 5.1-11
Fish Story
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Most of us are rather content with our lives. That may have been more the case before the Great Panic of October 2008. But ten years later most of us have recovered. Change is painful. We do not want to let go of our comfortable, old ways, which we must do in order to embrace the new. The faith story that we know as the Bible has a not-so-subtle purpose. The Bible's purpose is not understanding or even agreement. The purpose of the Bible story is transformation. We all have selective hearing. We hear what we want to hear. We hear that which blends smoothly into our preconceptions and prejudices. The Bible wants to lure us toward another world. The constant goal for us when we are in Bible study, Sunday school, or even listening to a sermon, is not understanding; it is conversion. Our problem is not that there are vast portions of Scripture which we do not understand. The problem is that we understand all too well. Our problem is not that Christianity is incomprehensible. Our problem is that we have tried Christianity and found it difficult. Being a Christian, taking the Bible seriously, can sometimes seem crazy.

I wonder if Simon thought Jesus was crazy when he told him to go out into the deep water and try again. I attribute the following story to Woody Allen. It is possible that there is a more primary source, but I have not been able to discover it.

It seems there once was a man who went to see a psychiatrist. The man was concerned about his brother. Sitting in the psychiatrist's office, he describes his family history. The psychiatrist, listening very carefully, begins to realize that the brother of the man sitting in his office believes that he is a chicken. After quite a long narrative concerning his brother's behavior – the one who thinks he is a chicken – and the family's awkward, if not embarrassed, feelings caused by his chicken behavior, the psychiatrist says to the man, "Bring him to see me. I have had great success in dealing with these types of psychosis. I am sure that I can help your brother stop being a chicken."

At that, the chicken-man's brother says, "O no, please don't do that. We need the eggs." I know that mental illness is serious. I also understand why we laugh at a story like this. We laugh at what makes us anxious. I laugh because maybe I will someday lose my mind and say or do crazy things. I used to think that was a funny story, but a ridiculous story. I also thought, "No one is that crazy." It seems like it was only a little while ago that as a hospital chaplain I was spending a great deal of time in hospital psychiatric units. I met a lot of patients who believed they were someone else. One patient in particular introduced himself to me as Dwight David Eisenhower. (For those of you not old enough to remember him, Eisenhower is a former president of the United States.) The first time we met, this patient and I had a very pleasant conversation. Over the next few weeks, I visited Mr. Eisenhower, which is how I addressed him, every day. Our relationship was developing.

I believed that Mr. Eisenhower was beginning to trust me. I anticipated a break-through any day. One afternoon, after I had been listening to Mr. Eisenhower talk for a long time about his life, he

leaned over close to me and said, “Chaplain, I like you. I don’t tell many people this, but I think I can trust you.”

My mind raced. I thought, “Finally my patience is paying off. He is going to tell me who he really is. It is the breakthrough for which the entire staff has all waited.” Mr. Eisenhower motioned for me to come a little closer. He smiled at me and said. “You can call me Ike.” Do you ever wonder if the disciples had some of those feelings about Jesus? I do not mean this in any way as blasphemous. I just wonder – if I am like the disciples: filled with doubts, never have enough faith, know how unworthy I am – did the disciples wonder if Jesus was crazy?

If we keep reading the story from Luke, or any of the Gospels, we discover that it was not only what Jesus said that made him different. It was what happened to people who heard Jesus speak. It is what happens when we hear the word of Good News – when we see the change in us caused by that Word.

Are we afraid that the Holy Spirit might take control of this church and then we will no longer be in control? When God calls us, and God does call each of us, do we hear that call and do we respond? Hearing God’s call does not always mean that we resign our jobs and go to seminary, but that is one way to respond to God’s call.

When God calls us do we stand with the amazed and unworthy Peter to say, “Git outta’ here Jesus.”? Are we just as afraid? Are we afraid even when Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid.”?

But how can we not be afraid when the boat is about to sink with so many fish? How can we not be afraid that something beyond our control is happening? We think we are experienced fishermen, but fishing with Jesus is like nothing we have ever done before. Yes, catching so many fish is a miracle, but Jesus calling us to be disciples is even more miraculous. We know that we are just people. We are just little Government Street Presbyterian Church. And the miracle of miracles is that Jesus is calling us.

When Jesus calls us, he gives us a new name. It is not chicken-man or “Ike.” It is “disciple.”

You want to hear something crazy? Listen to this: Jesus squats down out there in the courtyard by the fountain. He dips his hand into the water and lets it cascade down through his fingers. He looks at those of us who have gathered around him. He sees us for who we really are, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, accountants, lawyers, doctors, teachers, no one special, just folks. Jesus looks up at us and smiles. Then he says, “I’m going to take over the world and guess who’s going to help me do it?”

Is he crazy? Are we crazy enough to believe him? Do we say, “Git outta’ here Jesus.”? Or do we stand toe to toe and nose to nose with the nay-sayers of this world who think that living by faith is crazy, and we say to them, “Git outta’ here, we’ve got important things to do. We are disciples.”

There once was a fisherman whose Mama called him Simon. Jesus came along one day and called him Simon Peter, the Rock. When Jesus calls you a Rock, you are a Rock. When Jesus

calls you to follow, you follow. When Jesus calls you, you are transformed and become a disciple.

“Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people.”