

Deep Water Faith

Epiphany 5C

Luke 5:1-11

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Martin Luther King, Jr once wrote in a sermon, “On the one hand we must accept the finite disappointment, but in spite of this we must maintain the infinite hope. This is the only way that we will be able to live without the fatigue of bitterness and the drain of resentment.”¹ In our Gospel reading today, I wonder if Simon was dealing with disappointment and bitterness about his fruitless night of all-night fishing before Jesus stepped into Simon’s boat. Luke’s no-frills telling of this encounter leaves us to imagine what Simon was thinking and feeling. I imagine it was something like this:

Simon, tired and disgruntled after a long night of fishing which yielded empty nets, just wanted to go home, climb into bed, and pull the covers over his head shutting out the world. But that isn’t to be, for Jesus boldly steps into his boat asking to be rowed a little way from the shore so that he can teach to the crowds. Several hours later, his teaching done, this carpenter who conscripted the boat turns to Simon, a long-time fisherman, and tells him to put out into the deep water and let down his nets to catch fish that Simon knows are nowhere to be found.

I imagine Simon staring hard at Jesus, gauging what to say, and then giving a long-suffering sigh, before rowing back to shore to drag the nets back into the boat for what he knows will be an exercise in futility. As he rows away from the shore, Jesus sits calmly in the prow as they head into the deep water of the lake. Once they arrive there, Simon stormily grabs his nets as he shakes his head and mumbles something about crazy carpenters and his own craziness for agreeing to this futile task of catching fish. Jesus just continues to sit with his poker face on as he watches Simon stomp about the boat. Simon gives Jesus one more hard look before he throws the nets into the water. Drumming his fingers on the side of the boat, he waits for the nets to sink before he begins to pull them back into the boat expecting them to be empty. As he starts to pull, he feels the resistance of weight and gasps in surprise. Weariness forgotten, he pulls in so many fish that the boat sinks low.

When Simon stared down Jesus after being asked to head back into the deep water, he was faced with the choice that Martin Luther King, Jr. mentioned. Simon could either wallow in the disappointment of his unsuccessful endeavor, falling into resentment and bitterness, or he could accept the moment of disappointment and turn to the hope that Jesus was offering by working for better things to come. Despite being worn out, Simon chose the infinite hope of following Jesus

on that day and for the rest of his life. Simon continued to face times of weariness and disappointment. Following Jesus didn't turn his life into one of comfort and ease. His struggles are laid bare for us to read about two thousand years later. But Simon still stepped out of his comfort zone, facing hardships and obstacles as he embraced the infinite hope that Jesus offered.

Following Christ requires us to step out of our comfort zone even when we think it is the craziest thing in the world to do. Even when we are wearied of trying or think that we do wouldn't make a difference in the outcome. It requires that we have the same trust and faith in Jesus that he has in us. Jesus trusted Simon to do the work he asked him to do, and he had faith in Simon to accomplish that work no matter how impossible or unlikely it seemed to Simon. Simon, however, struggled to have that same trust and faith in Jesus. We are much like Simon.

Trust and faith go hand in hand. Having faith in Jesus means having complete trust and confidence in Jesus. Many of us believe in Jesus, but do we have faith in Jesus? Faith that he is with us every step of the way, guiding us against overwhelming odds to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. We talk a lot about our faith, but way too often we are talking about our faith in ourselves to believe in God. Faith and belief are related but they aren't the same.

Have you ever played the "trust" game where you must walk blindfolded through an obstacle course of chairs, tables, and trash cans, trusting the sighted person at your side to guide you safely to the other side without running into anything or falling? This is a game that shows the difference between faith and belief. When you are blindfolded and trusting someone to walk you through an obstacle course, how do you react as you walk? Do you put your hand out to feel for the obstacles? Slide your feet rather than step confidently? Keep pulling back because you are trying to control how they move you through the obstacles, or some combination of all three? If you do any of these things, then you may believe the other person can navigate you through the obstacles that bar your path, but you lack faith in them to do so. Having faith in the other person requires that you let go of your fears of stumbling into something, that you let go of your fear of failing, and just follow where they lead. No pulling back, no tentative sliding steps, just walking confidently where your guide takes you.

When it comes to Christian deep water living, the question isn't "do you believe in Jesus?" because you wouldn't even be considering putting out into deep water if you didn't. The larger question is "do you have faith in Jesus?" Simon had a lot of belief in Jesus, but his faith was often sorely lacking. But that is true of all His early disciples, and it hasn't changed much in two thousand plus years.

There are many reasons to stay on the metaphorical shore where it is uncomplicated and safe. Where you can just go home pulling the covers over your head to shut out demands of the world. There is only one reason to head out into the deep water where it is scary and seemingly impossible to accomplish anything. That reason is Jesus Christ's infinite love and hope. Heading out into the deep water, not knowing what to do or what to expect seems crazy. But if we are going to do the work that Jesus calls us to do, then we must have faith in Jesus to guide us through the obstacles that come from living a life of unconditional love for our neighbor. The overwhelming problems and dilemmas that we face, particularly now and in the coming years,

may threaten to throw us into bitterness and resentment. We have the choice of wallowing in finite disappointment or embracing the infinite hope of Jesus Christ.

Jesus trusts us and has faith in us to continue the work he began sharing his message of hope and love. Now, more than ever, there are people who feel scared, lost, and isolated. People who are struggling to stay afloat as the weight of responsibility and the burdens they carry threaten to pull them under. There are those who have sunk into bitterness and resentment, who are need in of forgiveness and reconciliation. And individuals who have given up, thinking that trying to accomplish anything is a fruitless task. They are struggling in deep water with no idea how to find their way to the safety of the shore- a place where they can find peace, understanding, and love.

Jesus calls us to head out in the deep water and bring them home to a place of community where they can get know Christ's infinite hope and love. While all may seem lost, it isn't. While the task ahead seems an exercise in futility, it isn't as long as we have faith in Jesus to guide us through the deep unknown waters that lie ahead.

Amen

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Shatter Dreams", sermon. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-x-shattered-dreams>