A.M.D.G. Season of Creation – Ocean Sunday Text: Luke 5: 1-11

 September 11, 2016

**Luke 5: 1-11** 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 of them 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 signalled to 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.

**Into The Deep**

How nice to see everyone again! I had a wonderful summer! I spent the last 3 weeks of it in the Maritimes on the East Coast of Canada with family and friends in all 3 provinces – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Rince Edward Island. Paul’s family had a huge reunion in Fredericton, NB with over 100 Taylors running around – some of whom I had never met before. I also got to spend 2 nights on Campobello Island in the Bay of Fundy – a place I hadn’t been before. It is where President Franklin Roosevelt had spent his childhood summers and later brought his own family for the summers. It’s a beautiful island – literally just a stone’s throw from the state of Maine.

And I got to spend some time on PEI – my ‘soul’ place and my favourite spot in the whole world. And lastly, I spent several days at a friend’s cottage in Nova Scotia. There I would wake early and take a cup of coffee to a spot overlooking the beach and across the water to PEI. What a wonderful way to expand your soul and to recharge your batteries! Each day, my friend Joanne and I would take a stroll on the beach. And – depending on the time of day and the tide schedule – we’d go swimming. Sometimes it meant wading out through shallow water quite a distance to where we could finally find deeper water. And on those days when the tide was out – it was tempting to just stay in the shallows – exploring the rocks and sea creatures stranded by the receding water. But it was glorious when we actually made the effort to get out into deeper water – where you could just let go and float – lifted by the rocking waves and lulled by the sound of the sea gulls.

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It was really only then – in deeper water – that you got a sense of the immensity of the ocean, and how small our place is in the vast scheme of things. And it reminded me – that for all we humans know – as much as we have discovered - there are still so many things we don’t know, and can’t control – so much that we are learning yet every day.

In 2015, for example – scientists discovered this Ceratioid Anglerfish that lives in the deepest part of the ocean, nicknamed ‘the midnight zone’. It doesn’t look like other Anglerfish. In fact, one news article I read this summer describes it as looking like a “rotting old shoe with spikes, a scraggly mustache and a big mouth with bad teeth.” And it has a long, angular fishing pole-like thing growing out of its head. Then there are these sea creatures that look somewhat like jellyfish – but which scientists say may be something else entirely. They were discovered on the sea floor near Australia. It fascinates me – and maybe even unnerves me a bit – to think of all the yet-to-be-discovered things that are in the deep, dark waters of the ocean! Scientists say it is the new frontier.

All of that was on my mind as I approached the Season of Creation, and today’s Ocean Sunday. And they were the images I held as I was reading the gospel lesson this morning from Luke – and thinking about putting out into the deep and what that might mean for us in our current context.

It is a familiar scene – Jesus preaching and teaching – the crowd gathered – and the setting, the lake of Gennesaret – better known to us perhaps, as the Sea of Galilee, where many fisherfolk would be busy at work. When the scene opens – we find Jesus standing by the lake and the crowds *“pressing in on him to hear the word of God.”* What an image! They are impatient – anxious – hungry to hear God’s word – that’s what Luke tells us about how excited they were to hear what Jesus had to say. With the crowds pressing against him – Jesus sees some fishermen washing their nets with their boats nearby on the shore. And he takes the opportunity to invite himself into the boat of Simon Peter - asking him to put out a little way from the shore. This way, he can comfortably teach the crowds from the boat without being smothered by them in their excitement.

This is really the first time Simon Peter appears In Luke’s gospel – although there is side mention just prior to this of a woman being healed, who is described as the mother-in-law of Simon. So we really don’t know if they are acquainted or Peter has just been eavesdropping as Jesus taught the crowd by the shore. In any case, he is willing for Jesus to use his boat as a pulpit. Then – when Jesus is done teaching, Luke tells us that he turns to Simon Peter, and says, *“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch”.*

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Remember that Peter has just finished cleaning his nets after fishing all night in preparation for the next day of fishing – a tedious and time consuming task. So it is no small thing that he is willing to let someone like Jesus – who is a carpenter, and not even a fisherman – to persuade him to take his boat out into deep water again and cast his newly-cleaned nets. Simon Peter was the fisherman. *He* knew where to fish. And he also knew that they had already been fishing all night without catching anything. Still – he is open to Jesus’ suggestion. “*Master*,” he says, “*if you say we should try it, we’ll try it*.” So they let down their nets again …. and suddenly begin to catch so many fish, that their nets start to break. They signal for help, and another boat comes – and still there are so many fish that *both* boats are filled to the point of sinking under the weight of the catch. Peter – overwhelmed by all this, falls on his knees before Jesus, and says, *“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* But Jesus responds, *“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will be a fisherman of a different sort. From now you’ll be catching people, instead of fish!”* And with those strange words, Luke tells us -Peter, along with James and John (the sons of Zebedee) who are partners with Peter, leave their boats and nets and everything, and they begin to follow Jesus.

Several things struck me about this passage. The first is the words “*put out into the deep water*”. It’s a biblical image that holds a lot of meaning for us. Shallow waters represents the safe places in our lives – where we can keep our feet on the ground and hold our heads above water. The thing is, though – you don’t have the freedom to swim in the shallows. You just have to make your way carefully over the rocks and plant life left by the tossing waves. On the other hand – deep water is much riskier. You can’t touch bottom. You just have to let go and float – trusting that you will be held up. But how glorious it is to discover the sense of freedom that brings!

In terms of our faith and our life in community as a church – many of us would prefer to play in the shallow water. It’s what we know. It’s comfortable and familiar. And it doesn’t take a whole lot of either courage or effort. But what our scriptures remind us today is that the shallows are where we *begin* the adventure of faith – not where we finish. Deep water is where God is calling us to go – to explore beyond the boundaries we have known, and to take the risk of swimming into the unknown, trusting that the Spirit will hold us up and keep us afloat - even as we open ourselves to new possibilities for ministry and service.

The same is no doubt true for most of us in our individual lives as well. Sometimes we need to try new things, to push our boundaries, and to explore new avenues of possibility – trusting that as we do so, God’s Spirit will guide us and give us the courage and insight we need for the next step.

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On the surface, this story from Luke is about fishing. But I think it is *really* about taking risks, daring to move outside our comfort zones and sailing into uncharted waters with openness, and a sense of faith, adventure and trust.

The other words from our scripture this morning that have stayed with me come from Jesus’ response to Peter after he prostrates himself at Jesus’ feet following the miraculous catch of fish. Jesus says to him, “*Don’t be afraid.*” – the same words, by the way, that were spoken to the shepherds on the hillside outside Bethlehem when Jesus was born. “*Don’t be afraid*.”

If on one hand, God is calling us to be risk-takers and adventure seekers by setting out into deeper waters – we are also being sent forth with reassurance. “*Don’t be afraid*.” When we set our sails of faith for the unknown of deeper waters – and leave the safe harbor of the shores we’ve known behind – it is the winds of the Spirit that will fill our sails and open us to new possibilities. We don’t venture forth alone. “*Don’t be afraid*.”

What will these coming days hold for us as individuals – and as a church community? Only God knows. But what a great way to start a new church year – setting our sails for deeper water, open to new possibilities on this grand adventure of faith to which we are being called. May God give us grace and courage. Amen