

In the Ordinary

Isaiah 6:1-8

Luke 5:1-11

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Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed, and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

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 signaled 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.

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It had been a horrible, miserable night. Simon and his crew had fished all night, had worked all night, and had caught absolutely nothing. When they docked in the morning there were fish buyers waiting on the shore for the catch, there were hungry people waiting for the catch, but there was none, and they were all angry, grumbling and annoyed. The crew had to be paid, yet there were no fish to sell to pay them. As fishermen for generations with their own experiences beginning even in their childhood, they knew these nights would happen but that did not lessen the financial blow, the frustration and exhaustion with nothing to show for it.

They tried to ignore the people they could not please and go about the tasks for their nets that were soaking wet, heavy, muddy, and tangled as they had worked all night dragging down to the bottom of the lake, trying again and again for a catch that was futile. There was nothing to do now but finish, go home, eat, sleep and go back to it again tonight.

Perhaps Simon and the other fishermen were aware of the large crowd gathering along the shore, perhaps they heard the excited buzz and chatter and may even have been a bit curious themselves. Or maybe they were just focused on the tasks so they could go home, sleep, and put the night behind them.

Suddenly this man that the crowd has gathered to hear stepped onto one of their fishing boats, and asked Simon to take him out a bit so that the crowd could hear and see him better. Whether or not Simon was just being polite or was happy to be having a front row seat for this prophet's teaching, is unknown, but Jesus did have his attention as he talked and taught.

When he was done, the exhausted Simon must have been ready to turn back to the shore and go home, but then Jesus caught him completely off guard by telling them to go out to the deep water for a catch. An itinerant teacher, a new prophet, a carpenter, is telling professional – commercial fishermen how to fish, and he could not be more mistaken. Everyone knows that the best fishing is in the dark when the fish come in toward shore to feed. The middle of the day is not the right time. The fish can see the boat and the nets.

Yet whether out of courtesy, respect, or just too tired to argue, Simon and his crew took the newly cleaned and folded nets back out and moved out to the deeper water, knowing it was a waste of time and clean nets---until it was not a waste, until the catch was so overwhelming that the boats creaked from the weight of the fish, until the tough, rugged men strained to lift the bursting nets, and the nets themselves were stretched so taut they began to break.

Even the most seasoned fisherman could not tell a fish tale as big as this catch was, yet here the incredible, unbelievable, was witnessed by those in the boats and those on the shore.

Simon, who will one day be Simon Peter, the one Jesus will call the rock upon whom he will build the church, responded to the great catch by falling on his knees and confessing all the ways in which he was not worthy of this amazing gift of grace. Simon, James and John, left the abundant catch and their boats to the community for their needs, and began to follow Jesus that day to catch people.

Jesus' calling of Simon, James and John, is right out of the ordinary, the most ordinary, and actually a bad day in the ordinary. Right in the midst of tangled, muddy fishing nets and exhausted, frustrated fishermen, Jesus asked for their help in being seen, in being heard. Their call to follow Jesus was a break into the ordinary. It was not like the call of the prophet Isaiah, with holy speaking Seraphs in attendance, and live coals on their mouths to blot out their sins, yet the moment resonated with the echoes of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And in their willing hearts they said, "Here am I; send me!"

Jesus called Simon, James and John as disciples in the midst of their ordinary, and in a moment when they were not at their best, when they most likely were not feeling good about themselves, when they had failed at what they knew best. God often becomes manifest in the ordinary, even seemingly unnecessary events of our lives— events which nevertheless align with some purpose that may not be known to us.

Jesus can walk up to us while we are in the middle of any normal day and ask us to assist him in a large or small way. He may ask for us to help him be seen, be heard. He may ask us to listen to his teachings. He may ask us to go out into deep waters—those places where we cannot see where we are going but must trust as we try something new.

It was a typical Thursday afternoon when Rosa Parks finished her workday and boarded the bus home and took a seat in the first of the back rows reserved for people of color. As the bus began to fill the driver ordered Rosa and three other coloreds to give up their seats as there was one white man who was standing. While the other three passengers stood up, Rosa politely declined. The police were called and told her that she would be arrested if she did not move. She defied the legal, social and cultural pressure and simply responded, “You may do that.” Inspired by Rosa’s arrest, the Montgomery Bus Boycott began, and lasted more than a year. Her nonviolent protests attracted national attention.

At the end of an ordinary day, Jesus stepped onto the bus and asked Rosa Parks to take a stand by staying seated. She did so with grace and humility, bravely taking a stand for justice by refusing to stand, and she went into the deep waters of the Civil Rights Movement.

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It was a dreary, rainy, raw November afternoon, exactly the kind of day you want to stay home and not even think of going out anywhere, but I wanted to make Italian Chicken and I didn’t have any canned tomatoes, so I drove to the grocery store. Stepping into the unavoidable puddles in the Big D parking lot and feeling the wind whip cold raindrops on my face instantly made me regret my craving for Italian Chicken, but since I had made it this far, I went into the store for the tomatoes. On the way home I saw a young mother walking along the side of road, somehow juggling a toddler on her hip, holding an umbrella and carry two plastic grocery bags. I pulled over and offered her a ride. She looked nervous, leery, at the invitation and said ‘no,’ at first, but when I tried again she accepted. She got into the back seat and held her son on her lap the several blocks to her home and was silent to my attempts at conversation.

Jesus can walk up to us while we are in the middle of any normal day, in the middle of craving something, and ask us to assist him with a seemingly small matter, because what may seem small and trivial will be bigger than we realize until later. He may ask for you to help him be seen, be heard. He will ask you to act on his teachings to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself. He may ask you to offer help to a stranger, he may ask you to allow yourself to receive help. He will ask you to risk, to go out into deep waters—those places where we cannot see where we are going but must trust as we try experiences we could not imagine and to receive the abundance of grace that is waiting out there.

Next Sunday we will gather for our annual meeting. Part of our time will be looking back, and some will be for looking ahead. Where has Jesus walked up to Smith Church in our ordinary days and asked us to assist him with a seemingly trivial matter? How has he asked Smith Church to help him be seen, be heard, to listen to his teachings? And as the pandemic is still a very central part of our lives and so much of what lies ahead is uncertain, we are called to ‘Put out into the deep water and let down our nets for a catch.’ What will our reaction be? Will we respond with a willing heart that says, “here we are, send us ?” Amen.