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St. James', Mt. Airy
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Epiphany 5C
Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm 138
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 5:1-11

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

Author Madeleine L'Engle once wrote, "I take the Bible too seriously to take it all literally."¹

As I read scripture, I often pair that quote in my head with this thought, which I heard expressed at a presentation by public theologian and author Diana Butler Bass several years ago: Just because it didn't happen exactly that way, doesn't mean it's not true.

One of the things we Christians often do is skim over the fact that the stories in our four canonical Gospels often don't match up – and in some cases oppose each other.

For example, instead of reading Matthew and Luke's vastly different birth narratives as separate stories, we combine them into one and call it a pageant. We do this with other parts of scripture too without as much intention or production, but the results are the same – we attempt to tame the wildness and variation of the Bible.

When we do this with the Gospels, I fear we lose the power of these narratives that were written at different times and for different communities – while still pointing toward the same truths.

¹ Madeleine L'Engle, *A Stone for a Pillow*, pg. 80.

Because there is power the fact that our foundational stories were not sewn together into one cohesive story – but were left as they were, showing us that from the earliest days of the emergence of Christianity, faithful people understood that the power of these stories wasn't in the correctness of the details, but in how they told deeper truths about Christ and how we are to be followers of Christ.

Which brings us to today, and Luke's version of the calling of the first disciples. I say Luke's version, because they are each different.

Mark and Matthew's call stories are actually very similar – short and to the point. In both, Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee and sees fishermen. He tells them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people," and the immediately (that's the word used in both) left their nets and followed him.

In John, immediately after being tempted in the desert, Jesus walked by John the Baptist and some of his disciples. John proclaimed Jesus the Lamb of God, and they left John and to follow Jesus. The next day they all traveled to Galilee where Jesus called more disciples saying, "Follow me," and "Come and see."

Only here in Luke do we have the calling of the disciples interwoven with the story of the miraculous catch (which is a story in and of itself only found in Luke and John – though different in placement and details).

Now there is plenty to mine from each of the call stories in the Gospels, but Luke just may be my favorite.

Remember that in Luke, after Jesus' baptism and temptation, he went out on his own and began preaching and teaching in Galilee before returning to his hometown of Nazareth.

We read about that a few weeks ago, and how he was rejected after teaching in the synagogue there. After escaping the crowd that tried to throw him off a cliff, he went on to heal a man with an unclean spirit, and then perform more healings at Capernaum.

It was only at this point that he called the first disciples in today's story. Jesus was becoming well known – people were responding to his message of unbounded love and grace – his ability to heal and bring wholeness.

And so, as a crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God beside the lake of Gennesarat, he climbed on a fishing boat so as to have a place to speak from where all gathered could hear him.

When he was finished speaking, he asked the fishermen to put the boat out into deep water and let the nets down for a catch.

Now I'm no expert on 1st century Galilean fishing, but everything points toward this being an odd request. It's not the right time (they mention fishing at night), and they were just out there and caught nothing (did he expect fish to suddenly appear?).

Simon responded with both doubt and faith: *Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*

Nearly immediately the nets were so full they were beginning to break and so they signaled for another boat to come and help – yet even then there were so many fish the boats began to sink.

In a fit of fear Simon pleaded for mercy and Jesus responded with, *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.*” When they returned to shore with the miraculous catch, they left everything and followed him.

What can we learn from this story, as it is uniquely told in Luke?

Perhaps one take away is that when Jesus shows up in your life, it's likely to turn everything upside down – and you'll have to leave behind your old ways of doing and being to follow him.

Maybe we can learn that doubt and faith exist naturally together, and that's okay.

Another might be that God's mercy is always there for us – even if we usually only notice it when our boats are sinking (literally or metaphorically).

Lastly, there is one important thing that is particular to the catch of fish itself we can learn from: God provided an overwhelming abundance.

The disciples didn't stop to sort the fish – deciding which ones made the cut and which didn't. Because the fish themselves weren't the point at all. The point was the overwhelming abundance – and their choosing to take in the overwhelming abundance.

They could have just cut the nets and been done with it all. But they trusted the way of abundance – and in their trust Jesus knew they were the ones to call to be his disciples.

When Jesus told them they were called to catch people, he meant it in same way of overwhelming abundance – that through their following of his way, their faith and doubt, their trust in his mercy, and their hearts open to abundance – their work would be to fish for people and welcome ALL – not just some.

When we, like L'Engle, take scripture seriously (if not literally), we come to see that this story of call, and all that it can mean, was not just for those first disciples, but is also for all who would be disciples – following Jesus' way of love – so let us follow on, friends.

~ AMEN ~