



“Put Out Into the Deep”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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Scripture (NRSV):

Luke 5:1-11

1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 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.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 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.

8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 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." 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Sermon:

I have at least 4 “happiest day of my life” days; one just isn’t enough.

- The day I married my husband, Jim.
- The day my daughter, and first-born came into the world, Brigid.

- The day my bouncy baby boy, Nick, was born.
- The day I was ordained into ministry in the United Church of Christ.

I cried on each of these days.
I worked hard for each of these days.
And each of these days changed me utterly.

That is what a calling does. That is what a vocation requires.
Whether it is Isaiah, or the fishermen who became Jesus' first disciples... a calling changes your life.
And when Jesus suggests to these fishermen that they go out into the deep water, go out again, after a long night of fruitless work, take a chance and try again, after exhaustion and frustration... he has to be a pretty good friend to convince them to go out again, go deeper, work some more!

The gospel doesn't tell us this, and some sermons might suggest that they were listening to a strong-willed stranger.
I'd like to suggest otherwise.

It is often friends who can convince us to go where we are sure we don't want to go.
It is often people who we know and trust, who tell us the thing we can't believe about ourselves.
Something we can't see, don't want to hear.

My bosses, two Protestant pastors, who welcomed me into the United Church of Christ... and my husband... were the people who kept telling me that I had a clear calling, a vocation. They were the ones who said I should quit my job, leave my family and the little house we had just bought, in the town where we had finally settled down... and go to seminary, three states away in northern CA.

So, I did. There was no temple full of smoke and seraphs, but there was the call to go into the deep, go out where it is risky, yet where the real abundance of life would be found.

Safety, tucked into our little grey house, was not going to work.
I know I was somewhat like Peter... I had worked hard to find a place on the staff of the United Churches of Olympia. I had gotten licensed to serve the church, both as their youth minister, then as their family minister and education director. I had found a good neurologist for our son, a caring school for both son and daughter, my husband had a good steady job working for the state of WA after a period of uncertainty, and unemployment.

I had already put in my long night of work: building a marriage for the first 10 years, starting a family, finding new careers, having two children, stabilizing our son's epilepsy, finding a home to own, building relationships anew, after being forced out of the Catholic church. I was tired, like Peter and his fishing crew.

But a calling asks you, "don't you want more?"
A vocation asks you, "won't you come join me?"

And how will you respond? There are innumerable ways to respond!
Are you going to step into med school, or nursing or counseling or teaching? Are you going to step into banking, or business, or electrical work, or painting, or parenthood?
Will you find yourself writing a book, or writing code, or playing music?

The glory of it all, the juiciness of it all...is not that there are some kinds of work that are a calling, that some of us have a vocation...it is that all of us are called and all of us have a vocation...for all of us have Jesus speaking to us, all of us can experience God touching us, with awe and wonder.

Every single person can hear the call to go out into the deep, where there is amazing abundance at the hands of God.
Out into the deep, where there is so much going on, so much richness, that the old nets of our ordinary days and nights, are torn.
Where the comfort of the good old boat we are used to is about to sink under us!

It's amazing out there in the deep!
And it will change you.

I gather here with you, privileged to stand in front of you, and proud to represent you day in and day out in our community, and on Sunday, I believe this is why we gather here...

To encourage one another to go deep.
To urge one another into the fullness of life, the wonder of a life of change and grace, of risk and reward, of loss and resurrection.

To practice listening for our friend, Jesus. To seek the glory of the Lord!

So that, even after our own nights of frustration and hard work and fruitless effort...
You and I will be able to hear his encouraging call, on a fresh new morning; the call to take the chance and go into the deep.

Where there is God's abundance, and that changes everything.

Yes, I went off to seminary. San Francisco Theological Seminary, affiliated with the Presbyterian church, USA.

And I left behind my husband, my children and my little grey house, for that first semester. That first night, sitting on my boxes in an empty apartment on campus, I cried. But the next day, my neighbors invited me over for their super bowl party. So, I cried less, though I did cry a little, missing my kids, missing my husband.

And the day after that, I went to my first class. And like Julie Andrews in the beginning of the Sound of Music, I stood on the verandah of the Seminary Library, and I twirled in a circle, in joy and disbelief, and cried some more.

How do I dare tell you that you should trust God, and go out into the new and the strange place, the deep place, the place where your life is changed forever?

Well, Jesus modeled this trust. And so did Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Countless others have, too. The world has been changed by that trust.

And so have I. I followed them, and my world was forever changed.

If you dare, you can begin. You can listen to another person's story of going deep, and you can be encouraged.

You can take the first step. Listening closely and praying hard.

Occasionally, you might even be caught up in glory, like Isaiah. Or you might just be tired enough, like Peter, to go somewhere new, at the suggestion of a true friend.

Even if you tell that true friend that you are sinful, and you are weak, and you dare not look up for your shame...even then,

That true friend will say to you, "Do not be afraid." "Join me in the fullest experience of the wonder of life."

And like Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John...I hope you will get up and go!