Text: Luke 5:1-11

**The Bethel Pulpit**

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Please join me in a word of prayer: Gracious God, throughout all time and place, you have called servants to words and deeds of faithful discipleship. Today we ask that you open our ears, in the midst of the Madison community in 2019 to hear your call to each one of us. Give us all the faith and strength and courage that we need to respond to your invitation to mission with you. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Today, Luke tells us a fishing story. I don’t know too much about fishing. I certainly have been in a boat, fishing. But usually, I prefer to be reading my book out on the water, soaking up the sunshine. What little I do know, tells me that THIS particular story, with Jesus, Simon (Peter), James and John, did NOT happen here in Wisconsin: not on either Lake Mendota or Lake Monona…at least NOT in February, with all of our cold and snow and ice.

Yes, we DO fish in Wisconsin, even in February, but we call it ICE fishing…or ‘hard-water’ fishing. But that is not the kind of fishing that Simon, James and John were doing.

Looking a bit at the story, we are in the 5th chapter of Luke, following Jesus along his journey from preaching his first sermon in his home town (Ch. 4), then healing people along the way, as a crowd of people followed him. When Jesus got to the shore of the lake, he sat in one of the fishing boats that had come in from a long night of fishing…and the fishermen were washing their nets.

We have no hint from the text in chapter 5 as to what Jesus was talking about, only that he ‘taught the people’. At one point, he looks at Simon (also known as Peter), saying: Push out from shore a bit…put your nets out deeper. Simon is tired from fishing all night…and discouraged from the paucity of fish in that portion of the lake, so he is reluctant to do what Jesus asks. Yet, he finally says: Because you say so, Master, we will do it.

Have you ever fished with a net? Once, with my family in Alaska, we fished the Russian River in the manner of the natives in the area: dip netting for fish. So, I have a bit of experience and a way to compare the difference between baiting one single, solitary hook and catching one fish at a time and the reality of ‘netting’ fish. Significantly, when you use a net, you do not have the option of choosing WHICH fish will be caught: you catch EVERYTHING !

That is an interesting image for the kingdom of God: God catches everyone in God’s net of eternal forgiveness and unconditional love. How do we, as God’s church, carry out that image in our many forms of ministry together.

We also notice in this story that Jesus does not call the disciples individually: rather, he calls them ‘in community’. Peter, James and John, leave their nets and answer Jesus’ invitation to disciple with him, as they minister to others in need.

This is true for us, as well. We are not called to work alone in all our ways of serving the people, caught in the net of God’s love. We have each other. Here at Bethel we have 5 ministry teams and 3 resource teams. Each team has approximately 4 people, so right there, we have more than 30 people meeting together, brainstorming new ideas and visions for ministry. Those 30 are in addition to all the people on the Joint Council, all the people in Bible study circles, all the people who tend our food pantry and homeless community…and we can go on and on.

The good news is that Jesus sees something in each one of us that God needs for the good of creation. Peter, James and John were not chosen by Jesus because they were smart or rich or influential. Jesus saw something in each one of these very ordinary people that would faithfully spread God’s kingdom…’catching’ people in God’s net of love and amazing grace.

“Lord, you have come down to the lakeshore, seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy; but only asking for me to follow.” These are the words of a hymn that help us understand God’s way of using each one of us. The last line of the refrain: “…on the sand, I have abandoned my small boat…now with you, I will seek other seas.

Jesus invites you and me, also, to put our nets out a little deeper…open our eyes and our ears for new visions and new options to walk faithfully with Jesus. May God bless your journey of faith. Amen.