

January 24, 2021

“Getting Deep”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 62:5-12

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.
Those of low estate are but a breath,
those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath.
Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.
Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,
and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.
For you repay to all according to their work.*

1 Corinthians 7:29–31

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Mark 1:14–20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make

you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Reflection “Getting Deep”

Whenever I have read this passage in Mark I always have that song come whistling through my head from the old spice commercials several years ago. Do you remember it?

It seems like a happy little passage where Jesus is strutting along , seagulls calling over the rhythms of the waves, the sunshine sparkling and dancing on the water, and he is collecting people to come and follow him and they leave their livelihoods and their families, drop their nets without hesitation and follow our Lord. And that’s how Evangelism began.

But of course if we look closer there is much more to it. The setting of the whole first half of the Gospel of Mark is actually by the sea of Galilee, which is a freshwater lake fed by the river Jordan, think Winnebago, more than Lake Michigan. It is surrounded by little fishing towns dependent on fishing as a trade, but listen to this.

In the time that Mark wrote this the fishermen are struggling. They used to be able to make a living fishing but they are now so heavily taxed by the occupying Roman government, and by local authorities who charge exorbitant prices to get a lease or license, that they can barely eek out a living.

And the wealthy locals looked down on them, calling them names while at the same time being dependent on them to increase their wealth. So dropping their nets and doing something different is a story of liberation from the control of the Romans and rebellion from the disrespectful, arrogant, and greedy.

The other thing I don’t want us to miss is what Jesus actually says to them. Repent, as we talked about before that means simply to turn around, turn around and face God rather than turning away from God.

And again we see Jesus preach about the kingdom of God being close. He tells us over and over again we have an alternative reality available to us at all times. Repent, Turn around the Kingdom of God is near! He tells his disciple that we can abandon the things that make us miserable and join in in the kingdom of God.

His words in this context are subversive. Quit making the rich richer, let go of all those things that make you think you are unworthy “your sins”, and follow me and I will show you how God wants us to live.

Where we show love for one another, where we aren't defined by our material wealth and social stature but by our concern and care for others, our healing and love of others. This is our good news.

Before I move on I want us to keep in mind how radical this idea is, to drop everything, leave it all behind, and follow Jesus into a life where Love reigns supreme, not greed, or power or control.

Now fast forward at least five years to Luke's telling of this same story. We know that Luke has the gospel of Mark sitting open in front of him as he writes his gospel. We can learn so much by reading these stories side by side, let me read it to you

Luke 5:4-11 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.

So in this second telling of this story we see Jesus saying. You are looking in the wrong place. Go Deeper! Simon is a little hesitant but trusts Jesus enough to do as he says and they are heavily rewarded for that trust. In this reading we see a theme emerge that when we follow God, there is abundance not necessarily materialistically but as a metaphor for the abundant, spilling over of God's love for us, it shows up in the feeding of the multitudes, and the wedding banquet to name a couple.

I know it is hard to think about Evangelism during a pandemic but I keep thinking of our community like a bulb under the snow being made ready for what's to come. We have been in hibernation but when this waiting is over we have work to do. Joyous, wonderful, faith filled work to do. When I think of Evangelism in post covid times, I think about these two stories and what we can learn from them, how we can adapt them to fit our time and place, what have we learned that we can use in times such as this, to quote Paul, as the present world is passing away.

There was a great article in the New York times this morning that gave me hope. It mentioned how we saw our leaders gather in church this week but Christianity as we have seen it in the last 30-40 years was not on display during this service, christianity focused on sexual politics, birth control, abortion, sexuality, gender identity. What was represented there was a more progressive Christianity that is on the rise, focused on combating poverty, climate change and racial inequality. Instead of seeing teargassed crowds for a photo op we saw leaders of both parties praying side by side. There should be hope for all of us in that, no matter what our politics are, the gospel as we know it, is being reclaimed.

Evangelism in Christianity has so often been about membership growth rather than sharing something so delightful and fulfilling. It has so often been about conversion and forcing right belief on people and so little about opening the door to that alternative reality where love reigns, where our focus for our lives, and for our living is on love, not money, or greed or who get's to sit at the head of the table, who is a winner and who is a loser.

That is not to say that money is bad, wealth is bad, or capitalism is bad. But where is your primary focus, where does your heart and mind dwell?

Through Luke, Jesus teaches us to go deeper, deeper than numbers to fill our pews. Deeper into the kingdom of God, deeper in love with God, and grow our love of each other even more. And he says to let him guide where we cast the net.

There aren't any more fish in the shallows, which I hear as young families with 2.5 kids. But there are people out there desperate for this kind of community and love. People convinced by their own experience that church is a place that just makes you feel guilty and bad about yourself.

People who don't feel like they belong anywhere, people who can't sit still in church, people who struggle with addiction, with mental illness, people whose families and church have abandoned them as they try to be their authentic selves, people who sit alone in their house, with no body. God calls us to go deep, to find them.

We are also painfully aware that there have been some holes in our nets through the years. People have escaped the grace we offer for one reason or another. I want us to cast in their direction again. I want us to repent and to figure out what they needed and why they didn't get it here.

Maybe the differences are too big to overcome but I want us to try. We need to let them know that not only are they welcome here, they are needed and we want them to be a part of this alternative reality where Love reigns. Where our boats are filled up and spilling over with the Grace, and the healing and forgiveness of God.

I know in our community there are people who feel literally overtaxed, overburdened by the economy and the feeling that no matter how hard they work they can't get ahead. Can we

acknowledge those feelings and needs, can we go to the depths with them, touch them with our kindness and show them the love of God.

If you don't feel like you have anything left to give anybody else that's understandable right now but I encourage you to read that Psalm reading every morning for at least a week and you will feel your love of God return, and it will heal you.

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from God.
God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
Trust in God at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before God;

It will fill the voids this life can carve in our spirits. Let those words roll around in the depths of you pulling you from the shallows and I promise you will feel that light of God reignite in you so much so that you will want to share it with everyone you meet. May it be so. AMEN

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