

**"Yet if you say so..."**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, February 10, 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Luke 5:1-11**

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on [Jesus] to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing! **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they caught a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the 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 astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.  
Luke 5:1-11

Will you pray with me. Astonishing God, open our eyes to the miracles you perform each day -- no matter about empty nets, no matter about despair and exhaustion, no matter about our little faith. Help us to take courage and not be afraid to give it one more try, even when we think we can carry no more loads. Open our minds to new possibilities. Open our hearts to accept your love and your trust in us this day. Amen.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke this morning records the calling of Jesus' first disciples to get into the boat of ministry with him and row out into the deepest waters of life to fish for people.

It always amazes me that even after almost twenty years of ministry, I read these stories of Jesus and each time something different catches my eye as I take in the words. I guess that's what makes the Bible the "living word of God" for me.

In this very familiar story of Jesus' calling of his first disciples, as Luke tells the story, the words that popped out at me this week were not the usual ones. They were not of Jesus' actions, or the miraculous catch of fish itself, or even Jesus' calling of his first disciples and his words of comfort and encouragements to them at the end of the passage.

The words that struck me this time come from Simon Peter's lips, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." (Lk 5:5) "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

I'm not a fisherman, but I have to believe Simon Peter and his companions were feeling pretty discouraged. Fishing was their livelihood. No fish, no income.

No fish, no food on the table for the family waiting back home. No fish, no future....

So Simon Peter's words to Jesus most likely came from a place deep down inside of him where worry and dejection and exhaustion live. Sound familiar? Lots of people now, in our time, in our country, are in that place -- where worry and dejection and exhaustion live. Simon and his fellow fishermen had been out all night -- no fish. They were probably tired beyond tired and sleepy -- eager to lay down and rest and forget it all until the next day, the next time they took their boats out in hopes of a good catch of fish.

Then Jesus sees them, gets into Simon's boat, does a little preaching to the folks along the shore, and says to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (Lk 5:4) I have to wonder if Simon Peter might not have been mumbling under his breath, "You want me to do WHAT? We've been out all night. I'm tired, and wet, and hungry, and sleepy, and I smell like fish, and you want me to do WHAT?"

But instead of saying anything like that, he answers Jesus, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." (Lk 5:5) "Yet if you say so...."

Now Simon Peter might have been skeptical. He might have even been a little, or a lot, annoyed with this fellow Jesus. He might have just wanted to go home, have a bite to eat, and gone to bed. But he said to Jesus, "Yet if you say so...."

What led him to do that? What led him to take a chance with Jesus? What made him overcome exhaustion, frustration at catching no fish all night, and who knows what other difficulties might have been weighing him down that morning? "**Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." What led him to say and do that? (get responses)

I don't know about you, but I've experienced a few times when I've done something, not because I had a particular plan of action in mind, or because I'd scheduled to do something, or because there was a particular reason. But "something" just told me I needed to do this thing, this activity, that was totally unplanned, unscheduled, unexpected, even unwanted, and amazing things happened afterwards -- perhaps not as a *result* of my unexpected action, but after it, nonetheless.

My going to Russia in 1994 for twelve days was one of those unexpected, unscheduled, even unwanted actions that lead to my leaving a financial planning career to go into ministry. The person who finally convinced me I needed to make the trip to Russia said words to me I'll never forget, "Susan, you have to take this trip because it is going to change your life."

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (Lk 5:4) And in responding to that command, with no good reason to do so other than it was JESUS who was asking, Simon's life was forever changed.

One commentator of our text for today writes, "Our reading for today tells the story of a 'seemingly insignificant encounter between two persons and opens up possibilities certainly not envisaged at the time by [Simon] Peter. It all begins with a risk on Jesus' part as [Simon] Peter could reject his initiative."<sup>1</sup>

Acting on faith, acting in spite of all odds of fishing success, acting with no real hope of a good outcome, both Jesus and Simon Peter take a chance in this encounter. Simon Peter followed Jesus' instructions and in doing so has his eyes opened to a new reality, a new beginning, a new way of life before him. **"Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."**

And what does Simon Peter do then, after the miraculous catch of fish happens? "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For [Simon] and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken." (Lk 5:8-9) It seems that Simon remembered his initial lack of faith in Jesus' instruction and admitted his disbelief -- perhaps as an act of remorse and regret and apology.

Then comes one of the best examples of Jesus' pastoral skills I know of. He says to weary but surprised and apologetic Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." (Lk 5:10) Jesus doesn't chastise Simon. He doesn't accuse him of being of little faith. He doesn't tell him his sins are forgiven. He simply says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

I love Jesus, don't you? We always, always.... get a second chance, and then another, and then another, to get it right -- to believe, to trust, to love, to act, to be.... as Jesus would have it, as God would have it.

The simple, yet very challenging task, is allowing ourselves to be open to taking risks, to trusting that "something" -- that nudge, that intuition, that insight from a verse of scripture, or even an unexpectedly intense conversation with another person -- that gets us to do things for reasons we can't explain. When we do, who knows what might happen? A whole new world just might open up.

Let the people say, "Amen."

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<sup>1</sup>Howard K. Gregory, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 332.