

February 18th, 2024

Luke 5:1-11 “Jesus Sought Me”

Welcome to the first Sunday of Lenten Season. Lent officially began this past week on Ash Wednesday which was also Valentine’s Day. Because Easter is determined by a lunar calendar, this phenomenon only happens about three times per century. In the 20th century it happened in 1923, 1934 and 1945. This century it’s already happened twice – Once in 2018, this year in 2024 and when it happens again in 2029 it will be for the last time in the 21st century. I point this out because having the first day of Lent on February 14th causes an odd dilemma. The most common things people give up for Lent are meat, coffee, alcohol and sweets – chocolate in particular. This presents a very specific problem on Valentine’s Day doesn’t it? The most common gift to give your sweetheart on Valentine’s day is a box of candy – usually chocolate! What does one do when faced with such a quandary? My solution is to reevaluate the whole practice of giving something up for Lent.

The traditional purpose of Lent is to prepare for Easter through prayer, repentance of sins, almsgiving, simple living, humbling of the flesh, and self-denial. Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days while being tempted by Satan which is why many Christians commit to fasting

and giving up certain luxuries. That's why some people refer to the practice of giving something up as a Lenten fast. You're giving up an earthly pleasure so you can make room for a spiritual discipline. Taking on a spiritual discipline does not have to be a burden though. So, let's say you're going to give up coffee for Lent. I know that's harder for some than others. Not everyone wakes up in the morning with their brain on fire like me. Some folks need a little jump start to get going. Instead of being miserable about the lack of caffeine, what if you made it a point to take care of a plant or listen to inspiring music or write encouraging notes to people in your life? Well. Clearly Pastor Jesse has never been through caffeine withdrawals. You're right. But I hope you understand the point I'm trying to make here. Lent doesn't have to be a season of drudgery. Sometimes you just need to do something different.

As a worshipping congregation, we're all going to do something different for Lent this year. Rather than going through the typical scriptures that the lectionary gives us during Lent, we're going to look at Jesus' ministry through the eyes of his disciple Peter. We've already explored Peter's relationship to Jesus over the last three weeks, but we're going to focus specifically on Peter's journey of faith as he learns what it means to follow Jesus. Like many of us, Peter has a wandering heart. That's what we're calling this series – "Wandering

Hearts.” Peter’s journey is not polished, or linear, or perfect, but he’s always tethered to God’s love. When you look closely at Peter’s story, you find Jesus at each step along the way—offering him abundance, catching him when he begins to sink, challenging him when he stands in the way, washing his feet, predicting his betrayal, and offering him love. We’re not going to idolize him or vilify him. Instead, we’re going to wander alongside him, open to what we might learn about Jesus and ourselves by walking in his shoes.

Peter was a fisherman by trade. We’ve set our communion table to reflect his vocation and to remind us about his big heart that occasionally wandered. We’ve also got these “squishy hearts” that you were given this morning. You can carry these with you to remind you about our journey with Peter. These are sometimes referred to as “stress balls” because some folks use them to squeeze when you’re feeling stressed out. I don’t know, maybe these will come in handy if you’re going through caffeine withdrawals. We’ve also got daily devotional books that you can take home too. I want to give you different options to make your Lenten journey meaningful this year. We all have different ways of learning, so it’s important for me to provide you with different tools to help you along the way.

The story today is unique to Luke's gospel. Jesus is teaching on the shores of Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee and the crowd that's following him starts to press in on him. Jesus' solution to this problem is to take a boat out on the water. The boat he chooses belongs to Simon Peter and so he asks Peter to take him out a little ways so there's some space between him and the crowd so that people can hear him better. After he was done teaching, he tells Peter to cast his net into the water. Peter says, "Look, we've been fishing all night and we haven't caught a thing. But if you want me to throw the net out again, I'll do it just because it's you who's asking mister carpenter's son who probably hasn't fished a day in his life." So he cast the net and they caught so many fish that it was going to sink the boat. Another boat had to come alongside them to haul all these fish in. Now you'd think that Peter would say, "Wow! What a haul! Thanks for the help, Jesus. You were right about where to cast that net!" But this is Peter. When you read anything about Peter, the first thing you'll discover is that he says what's on his mind. Last week our lesson came from Mark's gospel, and Mark described Peter as saying something because he didn't know what to say. Well, this week instead of Peter saying, "Thanks for the good tip, Jesus, I guess you did know something about fishing after all!" he falls down in front of Jesus and says, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man!" Why did he say this? Luke writes, "For he and all who were with him were amazed at the

catch of fish that they had taken.” Okay. But what the heck, Peter? Why the overreaction?

Here are some things that I suppose might have contributed to this exaggerated response. Fishing was commonplace for folks living in that region around the Sea of Galilee. For many, it was how they made their living, so if they did not succeed, there’s a chance that they’d become destitute. Maybe Peter reacted the way he did because he was afraid. “I spend the night toiling away trying to catch fish because that’s how I make my living, but this carpenter comes along and hauls in a week’s worth of fish.” It’s interesting that Jesus called them to become “fishers of people” because the people he sought were often the ones who were marginalized and destitute. This was a call to action. “I need someone like you who understands fishing to help me accomplish my mission.”

Jesus doesn’t seek out trained rabbis and priests to be his disciples; instead, he calls a few Galilean fishermen to follow him and join his ministry. After this miraculous catch, Peter and his partners drop their nets and follow Jesus. This was the beginning of their faith story.

Peter’s discipleship journey can provide a mirror for our own; we can learn from him, but mostly, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through his experiences. Like Peter, we are invited to bring the best (and worst) parts of

ourselves to God. Peter had a wandering heart. Jesus was always there to catch Peter, to walk beside him, to wash his feet, and to offer love. In Peter's story, we find Jesus. Peter's wandering faith ebbed and flowed, pushed away and pulled close. But again, he was always tethered to the love of God. This Lent, we're joining Peter in figuring out faith. We will wander alongside him, glimpsing at Jesus through his eyes. When we allow ourselves to be afraid and vulnerable, God's love washes our wandering hearts and showers us with calm, connection, and belonging amid upheaval. In the midst of fear and uncertainty, Jesus brought calm. He reminded us that God is with us. Jesus formed a community willing to follow. "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long" (Psalm 25). In despair, we found hope; in fear, we found peace.

During Advent, we usually ended our scripture lesson with a few questions to mull over throughout the week. We're going to do the same throughout Lenten season. So ...why do you think Peter resists the gift of the abundant catch of fish? Do you suppose he feels unworthy to receive a gift he hasn't worked for? Here's something to think about considering the historical context where he lived: Is it possible that he's afraid there could be repercussions from the Roman government, and that this abundant catch may lead to higher taxes and fines for his

business? As a Galilean fisherman who likely lived scarcely, does seeing this abundance feel jarring and unfamiliar? Does he consider himself “unfaithful” and therefore he resists being in Jesus’ presence? When have you been offered an abundant gift? Did you feel any urge to resist it? If so, why? This is a dramatic turning point for Peter. He will leave his home, his business, and his way of life to follow Jesus into a new calling. Have you ever pivoted your life in order to follow a new calling? What did you leave behind? How did that new path unfold? Where was God along the way? What is the beginning of your faith story? What are the first things you were taught about God? When was the first time you felt God’s presence? How does that shape the way you live your life here and now?

Thus begins our Lenten journey with Peter and Jesus. May our lives be tethered to God as we reflect on how our hearts sometimes wander.