

## Luke 5: 1-11

The lake of Gennesaret, Gennesaret means harp...it's another name for the Sea of Galilee. It's really just a little freshwater lake shaped like a harp...13 miles long by 8 miles at its widest point and today's story is pretty straight forward. The disciples are in the boat on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus beckons them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat... and the catch is miraculous. Jesus then asks them to drop their nets and they do...Bye!

They just leave everything and they follow...is that what you would do ...just drop everything and follow!? Any takers?!

It doesn't make too much sense, does it? So we really need some context here!

See its about Rabbis! Rabbi's came onto the scene during the intertestamental time. That's the 500 years between the Old and New Testaments. Rabbi means teacher of the law. And in the ancient world the Rabbi was "the man". The rabbi would interpret the Torah and God's laws for the people. And remember the word Israel means to "wrestle with" so Rabbinic teachings were an ongoing conversation and debate among the people.

And the place for these conversations was the town synagogue and anyone had a say in scripture interpretation...and on some occasions a Rabbi would come into the town.

Back then, as now, there were many diverse schools of thought. For example how would you interpret the commandment thou shall not kill? Sounds clear enough. They would debate and wrestle with these types of things. Can you kill a mosquito, can you never kill... then how would we live, could you kill an enemy or in self-defense etc...But unlike today they recognized there was not ONE true way to interpret the word of God. The Rabbis called this "turning the gem"...looking at things from different points of view.

It is through conversation that we enter into a relationship with one another and God at the center...and the Rabbis held a special wisdom when it came to the laws...they were seen as the best of the best!

Now a disciple just doesn't want to know what the rabbi knows, he wants to learn to do what the rabbi does.

Have you ever thought about Jesus being your rabbi (your teacher)? Do you think of yourself a disciple...a humble open student?

There is a story about Jesus walking on the water on this very lake...and he asks Peter to follow him, and Peter without any hesitation follows him out onto the water and begins to walk...he only sinks when he realizes he is following Jesus in a storm. He then loses sight of his teacher distracted by the waves and wind around him...he becomes afraid and starts to go under...but the point I am trying to make is that for a brief time Peter actually walked on water too...he did what his rabbi did.

Now Different rabbis had different interpretations of the law...(eg Rabbis Halal and Schamie conservative and liberal views of the law) have you ever thought about your faith as being an interpretation? Is it OK to have different interpretations of the Scriptures?

And why was the term Fishing for people so compelling? What would make these ordinary fishermen drop everything and follow Jesus? That seems very odd to us. But back then Jesus already had a blossoming reputation. And these fishermen probably heard that Jesus was on his way...teaching and healing. Jesus was a rabbi and like I said the rabbi's were the rock stars of their day. When a teacher came to town (especially a little town) everyone would take notice... and here Jesus came out to these young men where they lived and worked.

Now in ancient Israel all the children went to school to learn their Torah...after their elementary learning they would leave their education and would apprentice in their family's trade.

The disciples were fishermen on the sea of Galilee and many of them came from the small fishing villages on the Northern shore of the lake, from Bethsaida, Corzine and Capernaum...and they were younger than Jesus and plying their family trade.

Now during that time, the especially bright children would go on further in school to study Midrash or interpretation of the law (like college). And still others, a very small select few, the best and brightest would be chosen by a rabbi himself. They would then leave their homes and following their teacher in what's called walking in the dust of your rabbi...Which is to say they would follow behind the rabbi to become like their teacher in time.

The rabbi-disciple model was well established in Jesus' day. To follow a rabbi literally meant to "go behind". The disciples not only followed and learned but in time were to become a living embodiment of their teacher so that they too can live and act just like their rabbi did.

The disciples here were chosen to follow a rabbi and usually only the best and brightest were chosen. But here Jesus chooses among the everyday "any bodies" and "no bodies" to follow him...people just like you and me...to embody the living God!

The term Fisher of men had Messianic overtones as well. The term harkens back to the prophet Jeremiah as he spoke of the day when all God's people would be gathered back together. Luke also adds the miraculous catch to his story emphasizing the fact that Jesus is something really special...not just a Rabbi.

The disciples were given the honor to follow this "up and coming" rabbi, and they did not hesitate to follow...this would be a chance of a lifetime for them. A Rabbi and the Messiah! That would be an easy choice for them to make.

It is very probable too that Jesus groomed His disciples right here in this region as they continued in their work and family life. Many times, we get the impression that they just left everything behind never to return...but that was probably not true...the One Thing that is certain - is that their life now centered on Jesus and His teachings.

The Disciples education was organic and they experienced the kingdom of God intersecting the lives of ordinary people living and working in their communities.

So how did a teaching and way of life experienced by 12 any bodies become what we see today. See it was a message of hope given to people who needed to transcend their fears of life and their poor circumstances. It was a message of the extraordinary, to ordinary folks. I wonder if we could use that kind of message today?

The good news was shared in community and conversation as ordinary people invited other ordinary people into this experience of God right there in their midst...

And many of those needing to hear the gospel were especially those people who were oppressed and on the margins of society...afraid...same as today.

See the people in power never really see an upside in sharing their gains with the have nots...the no bodies...they are special...above others.

But it is by inviting others and in sharing God, and our stories, that we come to experience a different kind of existence in life...something more meaningful and deeper...something connected and Holy...experiencing the extraordinary right here in our ordinary lives! Something that no amount of money can ever buy.

Now on several occasions, I myself have had extraordinary things happen in my life.

But it is in sharing my stories of God, working in and through my life, that got others to also open up and tell their own stories of God working in their lives too.

In fact it seems many, many people have experienced the extraordinary power of God working in their lives but then they fail to share it with others. They're afraid they would be looked at as crazy or just not right.

If I had all morning, I could tell you story after story about God showing up in my life in very real and concrete ways. See it's not a belief for me...belief is overrated! You can believe in anything! God for me is an experience. My faith is only as good as it is lived out in action...God experienced!

As I like to say there are no coincidences - only God incidences!

One interesting fact is on the rise. In Diane Butler Bass' book *Grounded* she talks about the decline of religious life in America (no surprise there) but she also reports about a significant rise in people having mystical experiences.

Half of all people in the US report having some mystical transcendent experience in their lives. So why aren't we talking about this stuff!?

Why are we not inviting others into this conversation? Something's going on here... Do we really think the Holy Spirit of God just stopped talking to folks 2000 years ago with the only story being in the Bible...how many other stories are there in people's lives?

If we truly believe in a divine being or a divine intelligence, then it would make sense that that Divine being is still communicating with us all today.

For me I can say that I see God all the time and I have many such stories of God incidences in my life...I have no need to believe in God because I have personally experienced God myself...over and over and over

again!!! Maybe you have too! So tell your story and invite others into your story!

Why did Jesus pick the disciple's He did? It should be obvious by now...they are us...normal, ordinary, day-to-day people...living and working in their ordinary lives...just like you and me.

And we are invited by Jesus to follow Him...not that we need to drop everything we do for a living or leave our family or our community... but that we are invited to place Jesus, our Rabbi, and His teachings at the center of our lives. There's that Greatest Commandment again!

And when we do this we become fishers of people my friends... inviting people back to their creator and back into communion with all of creation...inviting people back into a relationship with God.

It's a movement of "the any bodies" and the not "good enoughs" and the nobodies! Jesus calls us everyday people to be His disciples... and those twelve or so folks... well they changed the course of history didn't they! I wonder what impact we Christian's are having on the course of human history? Today?

During Epiphany we remember Jesus is a king coming to the unexpected in unsuspecting ways - And that seems to me to be God's M.O! It's quite different from how we see power isn't it...And it may seem upside down to us at times.

But following Jesus is never easy! Jesus doesn't come to make our lives more comfortable, Jesus doesn't help us fit in and succeed...in fact it's usually the opposite!

But once you truly experience God, you will start noticing the false idols of the world...and along with this... we will also begin to see God all over the place as well... We will begin to glimpse what God has in store for our lives and beyond. And we will begin to see God in all of God's creatures... especially in the face of every human being...Nothing is

quite ever the same after we encounter the living God. Something changes deep within us...

...and we ordinary disciples... we any bodies... WE will come to usher in the Kingdom of God today on the Earth...Now go and cast out your nets...share your stories and go fishing for people my friends...and may you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi – Jesus the Christ!

Your faithful servant,

carmen