

*Based on *Luke 5:1-11. Simon Rows Into the Deep with Jesus*

**Dramatic Re-Telling Below*

They are tired.

Simon, James and John, and all the rest.

Working day and night and night and day along the Sea of Galilee to feed themselves and feed their families, as the standard haul of fish for local seashore villages shrinks and shrinks and shrinks. Until one night, the night before Jesus arrives, the haul just shrivels up and dies.

This shrinking haul of shriveled fish for local villagers along the Sea of Galilee has not occurred by chance. It is not some freak force of nature that depletes the lake. Instead, commercial enterprises from across the Mediterranean have taken over, plundering the lake for the elite back home, who love to eat Galilean fish, backed by the full faith and credit of the Roman government.

Back in Rome, now that the haul has shriveled, they are freaking out over “hiccups in the supply chain.” But here in Galilee, there is simply nothing left for the local little guy, who used to be the only guy, who used to be able to trust that the land and the lake would always provide. Local villagers are now truly at their wits end. Hungry. Terrified.

Along comes this weirdo Jesus, this wandering preacher-man we have heard so much about, waxing eloquent about “The Democracy of God” – in contrast with the so-called democracy of Rome – with its good news for the poor and its liberty for the oppressed. The locals along the Sea of Galilee surely see themselves these days as poor and oppressed.

In a twist of irony, the one who claims to be so concerned about freedom and liberty ends up calmly commandeering another man’s boat as his pulpit to the masses.

That man is not impressed.

Great idea Simon says, rolling his eyes, when Jesus, instead of rewarding Simon’s backbreaking fruitless labor with a good night’s sleep and a hearty breakfast, implores him to keep on working.

Whatever, Simon retorts. Okay, fine.

And here is where the miracle kicks in. Not the obvious one of a massive haul of fish from seemingly nowhere, but the one on which the entire Way of Jesus turns.

Simon has every reason to be jaded. Every reason to feel cynical. What a great idea, Jesus, we can hear Simon thinking, this whole Democracy of God business sounds great. But I just spent all night in this *real world* so-called democracy, which is really an imperial exploitation of everything we have held dear for generations, and I am tired, and I am hungry, and I am going back to bed.

James and John and all the rest have every reason to feel the same. And here is where the miracle kicks in.

Contrary to all dictates of reason, as the biblical scholar Eduard Schweizer says, Simon does try again. With no good rationale other than “Jesus told me to,” James and John and all the rest follow Simon into the deep. The end result being, as our own Linda Kelso so glibly remarks, that Simon needs a bigger boat!

We are tired, too, I hear over and over and over again. COVID and more COVID and 900,000 times more COVID tired. Mental illness exacerbated by COVID tired. American Democracy hanging on by a thread tired. Racial justice taking ten steps backward in our state tired.

And here comes Jesus again, in our tired, waxing eloquent about The Democracy of God with its good news for the poor and its liberty for the oppressed, and we are still tired and jaded and cynical. Here comes Jesus again, urging us into the depths of the pain and suffering of the world, and we are tired. Here comes Jesus again, urging us into the depths of envisioning abundant life (!) and we are tired. Here comes Jesus again, urging us into the very depths of our souls, and we are tired.

And we have a choice, in our tired and jaded and cynical, as Simon has a choice in his. Which is that we can keep on moaning and groaning about how bad things are for us and how much worse they are getting – all of which is true – or we can row ourselves into the deep with Jesus and start *living* The Democracy of God *as if* it were *already* here on earth, as it is in heaven.

This, in the end, is what happens for Simon and James and John and all the rest. As they row into the deep with Jesus, even in their tired, even in their cynical, they finally figure out that, while The Democracy of God is most emphatically about *them*, it is also equally emphatically about *more* than them! And we do, too.

When we row into the deep with Jesus, even in our tired and jaded and cynical, we find The Democracy of God is also about our mission partners in the Congo, who have only just now received their first doses of COVID-19 vaccines, one full year later than some of us received ours. When we row into the deep with Jesus, we find The Democracy of God is also about our social justice partners on the southern border who are still navigating the Remain in Mexico policy, even after a change in presidential administrations.

When we row into the deep with Jesus, with find The Democracy of God is also about thirty plus hungry families right here in Jefferson County fed through the Community Meal this evening coordinated by Bert Wright and Adam Ware, not as an act of charity, but as a *commitment to justice*. When we row into the deep with Jesus, we find The Democracy of God is also about too many families living in substandard housing right here in Jefferson County, and our call to correct that problem one family at a time, through our Habitat build.

In the deep of our tired, what Jesus is trying to get us to understand is that abundance and good fortune in The Democracy of God are not for ourselves alone!

Once Simon digs deep into the chaos at the heart of the Sea of Galilee, once Simon learns to call out for help, not because the haul of fish has shriveled up but because the haul is so abundant he needs a bigger boat, once Simon learns what it is to *share* “The Democracy of God” with an entire hungry village instead of mumbling

and grumbling about how he's been done wrong, once Simon rows into the deep with Jesus and discovers there the promise of abundant life, Simon can conjure the courage to chisel off the chip of his own misfortune that he has carried on his shoulder night after fruitless night, and set off to rescue others from the deep of their tired and jaded and cynical, too.

Simon does this, as Bishop Howard Gregory says, not because he is forced to do so but because he "has experienced the grace of God in a moment of revelation and can do no other."

Which is our invitation, too, as we come to the table today, in the deep of our tired, in the deep of our jaded, in the deep of our cynical. Here at the table we encounter abundant life in The Democracy of God that is emphatically for us, and equally emphatically not for ourselves alone.

Here at the table, Jesus sees the potential in us, as Jesus sees the potential in Simon, even if we cannot see it in ourselves. Tired as we are. Grumpy and cranky and ready to give up as we are. Ordinary folks called upon *and able* to do extraordinary things, as we are.

There really is no other way, as Khalil Gibran reminds us, in our cover poem for today. In the deep of our tired, the river in all of us – the flows from the throne of God – needs to take the risk, trying again, over and over and over. *Only then will fear disappear*. Only then will all of us together, in the true spirit of The Democracy of God, *become the ocean*.

Let the church say, Amen!

**Dramatic Re-Telling of Luke 5:1-11*

*Our Lesson today continues the journey of Jesus
preaching in synagogues along the Sea of Galilee,
proclaiming good news to the poor,
release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind,
and liberty to the oppressed.
Also known as "The Democracy of God."*

*One day, Jesus is standing beside the lake,
nowhere near the synagogue,
when the crowd begs him
to teach them all about this so-called
"Democracy of God."*

*Jesus sees two boats
grounded on the shore of the lake,
abandoned by the fisherpeople,
who are washing their empty nets.*

Jesus boards one of the boats

– the one belonging to Simon! –
and volun-tells Simon to anchor not far from the shore.
The boat becomes the pulpit from which Jesus begins to
preach a sermon about “The Democracy of God.”

Ten minutes later
– Twenty minutes later!
– Thirty minutes later!
Jesus says to Simon,
“Return to the deep,
and lower your nets
for a haul.”

Simon retorts,
“Suuuuure, Mr. President of The Democracy of God!
We work our buns off all night long and get nothing.
We always work our buns off and get nothing!
But you’re the boss, so here we go again.”

[The theme from Jaws plays in the background:
– You’re gonna need a bigger boat. –]

Simon and his crew lower the nets.
Lo and behold, when the haul is brought up,
they have fish coming out of their ears!

[The theme from Jaws plays in the background:
– You’re gonna need a bigger boat. –]

They signal their partners in the other boat
to hurry up and help them.
And they come and fill both boats.
There are so many fish, both boats begin to sink!

[The theme from Jaws plays in the background:
– I told you, you’re gonna need a bigger boat. –]

Simon Peter gets his comeuppance.
“We’re not worthy!” he declares.
“No joke. This is way too much for me.”

Simon is actually a bit freaked out
by this haul of fish flopping around in their boats,
and so is everyone else,
including James and John, the sons of Zebedee,

who are partners with Simon.

*Jesus says to Simon,
“Do not be afraid;
from now on your job is
to haul people out of the depths,
just like you hauled these fish.
You will save their lives.”*

*The fisherpeople beach their boats again,
leave the fish for the desperate villagers,
and venture forth to join The Way of Jesus.*

*[The theme from Jaws plays in the background:
“You’re gonna need an even BIGGER boat.”]*