

**“Called by God”**  
**Luke 5:1-11**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Epiphany—January 20, 2012**  
CCUMC  
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**Before Scripture Reading**

We begin this week a sermon series during the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means literally “manifestation,” and we associate with the coming of Christ’s light among us—as a star in Bethlehem and as a light in our dark world. I’m calling the series “Accepted By God.” Each week we will look at how God calls us, encourages us into ministry in the light of Christ. This week, as is typical for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany, we look at God’s call upon our lives. Our scripture is Luke 5:1-11. Hear God’s word to us.

**Luke 5:1-11**

Have any of you ever felt unworthy? Have any of you ever had any experiences where you encountered someone or something who made you feel “less-than”, demeaned you? Have you ever felt worthless?

When I was in seventh grade, I encountered a kind of math unknown to me before. Algebra. I could not understand it. Let your ‘a’s and ‘b’s be letters of the alphabets used to make words, I thought. Letters have no place in math. I was entirely confused by it. I was completely afraid of it. I would have real math anxiety—complete fear in the face of math. In my own mind, I internalized my inability to do this math as a sign of my unworthiness. I thought, “I’m not smart, I’m dumb.” Perhaps some of you have a negative internal voice that whispers “less-than” thoughts to you at times.

Confronted with this challenge, I decided I would just have to work harder, ask more questions, and dedicate myself to overcoming this math. My dear dad spent every school night with me, tutoring (as he continued to do through trigonometry and calculus, God bless

him.) My teacher patiently answered all my questions in class. Rest assured, that by the time I understood the math problem, everybody else in the class did, too. I can only attribute my fire to learn, to understand, to the work of God within me, giving me power to overcome my own sense of unworthiness. At the end of the year, my teacher awarded me the Math Award in my middle school. She said to me, “Melanie, you will make the best teacher someday, because you have worked so hard to understand. You will understand other students when they struggle to learn. You would make an excellent math teacher.” She offered to me a calling (one I didn’t quite take up!). A calling that said—“you can do this. You can do more than you thought you were capable of doing. You can be an agent to help others. A calling that said—“stop being afraid. You have work to do.”

## **II. Simon Peter and Unworthiness**

Simon Peter, the main character in our story today, struggled with feeling unworthy. He was just a regular guy, doing his fishing. He had to work hard physically for a living. He wasn’t an erudite Pharisee who taught in the temple and religious courts. He was a small businessman trying to make a living, and having a very, very rough go of it. He’s having a very bad time at work. On this night, he has been fishing for hours, and has nothing to show for it. Maybe a low catch has been his reality this week, or this month, or maybe even this past year. Simon is feeling very down on his luck, and not so good about himself. He has a family dependent upon him---maybe he has debtors and unpaid bills. He has math anxiety, but it is because his income numbers don’t add up to any food for his household. Maybe he is afraid his whole business is going to go completely under. When a person is in such a place, he starts to feel like he isn’t worth much. He’s useless to his family and his co-workers. He is really afraid.

Jesus gets in his boat, and asks him to let down his nets—a long trammel net attached to three floats, with an inner net of small mesh that could catch the fish. Peter is hesitant. He's like Moses and the prophets before him, who resisted when God called them to do something hard, something that hit right where they were afraid. Peter is feeling unworthy. "Master, we've worked all night and haven't caught a thing. But, if you say so, I'll let down the nets." Peter thinks what Jesus is asking of him is too much. "Really? One more throw of this heavy net? Can't you see I'm absolutely exhausted and spent? (big sigh) Okay, I'll do it. I've got nothing else to lose."

Then a miracle happens. Peter's net's inner mesh splits from holding so many fish. Fish are so abundant that their boats begin to sink. All those fish are money, which means that Peter is no longer destitute. Peter doesn't have to worry about those bills, or supporting his family. Overwhelmed, he drops to his knees. He can't believe his good fortune. He doesn't know what he has done to deserve this. He doesn't feel worthy of such bounty. Peter is a fisherman as ordinary as they come; he has no special qualifications to offer in return for such a gift. Mired still in his "less-than" thoughts he says, "Leave me Lord, for I'm a sinner."

### **III. Jesus' Call of Peter**

Jesus doesn't accept Peter's feelings of unworthiness. He doesn't leave Peter. His presence itself demonstrates that Peter is worth God's time. His miracle for Peter and James and John shows that God cares about ordinary people trying to make a living; God cares about people down on their luck, people having a hard time, people living in fear.

Jesus doesn't leave Peter groveling at his feet. He says to him, "don't be afraid." Jesus is saying, "let go of your fears of the future, of your fears for your family, your life. Let go of your feelings of unworthiness. I didn't come to call the most qualified, erudite,

prestigious people. I came to call people who know about work, people who know about what it means to suffer, people who are dedicated and committed. I came to call you. From now on, you are going to be fishing for people. You can do more than you thought you were capable of doing. Stop being afraid. We've got work to do. You are being called into service for God's kingdom."

Now here comes the miracle of the story. Sure, the abundant and extravagant catch of fish is a miracle. The real miracle, though, is that Peter decided to leave behind everything, and follow Jesus. The Greek word for 'leave' is *aphiemi*, and it literally means to be freed. Peter is freed from feelings of unworthiness. He is freed from his worries about his family, his concern for his economic livelihood. This man, who just an hour before was in the depths of despair, wondering if he was good for anything, realizes that he is good enough for God incarnate. He is free from captivity to worry, fear, wondering if he's worthy. He can leave all that behind, and begin a new life as a follower of Jesus Christ. He's got work to do. He's got to tell other people, other ordinary, working people just like him, that they are worth something, that they matter, that they too can be freed from their fears.

He hauls his heavy boat ashore, steps onto dry land, and starts sharing the love of God with people who need to hear it the most. Peter, the one who felt he was such a sinner, would become the "rock" of the church; he would become the significant leader and preacher. He who thought he was unworthy became the bedrock to the first Christian communities.

### **Jesus' Calling of Us**

Maybe the love of God for you is something you need most to hear this morning. Perhaps you need to know that Jesus came to call ordinary you---not a celebrity or otherwise extraordinary person. Perhaps you are feeling down on your luck, or you are wondering

about the status of your small business, or you are having some math anxiety about how numbers might add up. Maybe you struggle, or have struggled, with feeling worthy, with feeling you are less-than, with wondering if your life matters. Maybe you are feeling really afraid.

Jesus steps into the boat of your life, and looks lovingly at you huddled on the bottom, surrounded by all kinds of fish, all kinds of blessings. He says to you, “Don’t be afraid. Let go of your fears of the future, of your fears for your family, your life. Let go of your feelings of unworthiness. Be freed; leave all that junk behind. I didn’t come to call the most qualified, erudite, prestigious people. I came to call people who know about work, people who know about what it means to suffer, people who are dedicated and committed. I came to call you. You are worth God’s time. From now on, you are going to be fishing for people. You can do more than you thought you were capable of doing. We’ve got work to do. You are being called into service for God’s kingdom.”

May we at Carbondale UMC accept Jesus’ challenge. May we *aphiemi*—may we leave behind any fear and step into God’s call upon our lives. May we go out and fish for some people! Thanks be to God. Amen