



Sermon for January 26, 2025

Luke 5:1-11 “Invitation to Love”

I was talking with a friend this week, and we were reminiscing, as you do with someone you’ve known a long time and thinking about how different our lives have turned out from where we thought we’d be. Not in a good or bad way, but just that our earlier selves would stare at us incredulously if they knew what our lives looked like today. Our faith journeys came up in that conversation, and I found myself thinking about the many, many people who have shaped my understanding of God and faith. Of all of those people, from pastors to Sunday school teachers, to professors, to friends, I think that my family has been the most impactful. One of my very earliest memories is my mom kneeling with me next to my bed, teaching me to say the Lord’s Prayer. But of all of it, of all of the conversations I’ve had about God, about faith, the thing that has stuck with me the most—the thing I can’t quite seem to shake—is this idea that has been poured into me my whole life: That God loves creation, that God loves me individually, and that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that I can do that would make God stop loving me. That the way God created me to be is perfect, and my identity is seen and valued by the God who will never leave me or forsake me.

This isn’t, for me, just something I know in my head. This is something I don’t have to question, something I know to be true in the core of my being. This knowing, this deep seated belief that God loves me has shaped every aspect of my life, it has carried me through my best and worst moments, it gives me something to come back to again, and again, and it is only possible for me to know because of the countless people who taught it to me and who have reminded me of it again and again.

Whatever your faith journey has looked like, we all have people who have shaped our understanding of God, who have helped us recognize the work of God in our lives. I invite you to take some time, today or this week, to remember those people who have helped to shape your faith. This is worth looking back on for us, this week, as we hear this Gospel message of Jesus meeting his disciples for the first time and inviting them to participate in this ministry.

We, too, are invited to participate in this ministry of Jesus, in our own lives, contexts and communities and I think the best way to do that is to let our assurance of grace, our knowledge of God’s love shape our actions in the world. I think of the people who taught me that God loves me, the people who have reminded me of it again and again. I think that is the kind of work that we are called to. The last thing the world needs is more voices, shouting into the void that if everyone would just believe the same things that they did, or acted the same, or went to the same church, that the world would be a better place. Instead, I think the work that God calls Simon Peter to, the work that God invites us into, is the work of sharing God’s love in the world. Think of the people that taught you that God loves you and think about how you might be able to do the same. This looks different for all of us—there isn’t one “right” way to participate in this invitation. But I think it starts the same—recognizing the image of God in those around us. In recognizing that God loves us not in spite of, but because of, our differences. The image of God is not contained to one gender or race or sexual orientation or age or ability—the image of God is reflected in the deep, beautiful diversity of the human experience.

There’s one more thing I want to say about this encounter with Simon Peter and Jesus. Sometimes, there’s a part of me and maybe you that hears this story and thinks, “Wow. Simon Peter really got it all correct here. He listens to Jesus, recognizes the miracle that has taken place, and sacrifices his whole life to follow Jesus”. And then, we might start to feel like maybe that’s a lot of pressure for us. Because we don’t really want to do that. And we might not even recognize Jesus or a miracle. But here’s the thing about Peter—yes, he kind of knocks this encounter out of the park. This is great for him. BUT. Peter, in just about every other story about him in the Bible, is going to get things wildly wrong. He, and all the other disciples, are going to misunderstand, to make mistakes, to get prideful and angry and ultimately abandon Jesus. He is going to mess up time and time again, and Jesus is still

going to keep him around. The same is true for us—the pressure is off. God’s love being spread in the world does not require our perfect execution of pre-planned actions, but us being open to the ways that the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst.

The rest of Simon Peter’s life is completely different because he accepts Jesus’ invitation. I think this is the perfect text for us to think about as we gather after worship for our Annual Congregational Meeting. In this time of reflecting on the past year, celebrating how the Holy Spirit has been at work at Grace, and preparing for the future, I invite us to keep in mind the invitation towards participation in our text today. How has God changed you? What are the core convictions of faith that keep you going, on your best days and your worst days? How does that motivate how we are in the world? These are questions that look different for everyone, and I think they are important questions for our community of faith as well. For Simon Peter, this encounter with Jesus on the lake changes everything. What does it change for us?

Vicar Jesse Hershberger