



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

January 26, 2025 - Into the Deep

(Luke 5:1-11)

A thousand years ago I was out a little sunfish with my Heather and Jeffrey - my friends' niece and nephew and they were quite young. We were on a small lake and they had their fishing rods. The sun. A gentle breeze. The water splashing. It was grand until it wasn't. Christopher caught a fish, pulled it out and swung his rod over toward me. He looked at me with his excited eyes and kept waving the rod and fish in front of me. I said all the good words celebrating his catch. He kept waving the fish. It took a while and I forget the exact exchange but I did realize that it was my project to take the fish off the hook. I can remember a number of false starts as I started to grab the slimy, living fish and couldn't quite get my hands to grab on.

The joy of a successful catch has stuck with me and I am feeling his joy as I listen to the story of Jesus on the sea of Genneserat. In that story there is the joy of an incredible catch. So many fish they needed more than one boat and they both began to sink under the weight of it all. They have it made. Enough fish to satisfy their hunger and economic needs for quite a while. It's oh so good.

The goodness even more so because they had been totally despairing. They had had a night of unsuccessful fishing. No fish and all the tasks and labor to clean up the nets that had not caught anything. In the morning sun they go about their jobs when Jesus shows up and uses one of the boats as a pulpit. When Jesus finishes his teaching he instructs Peter to go back out fishing which is ridiculous. Its day time and they fish at night. They had fished and had caught nothing. This is a stupid and futile exercise but it's this Jesus who gives the instruction and there is something about him. And this Jesus stays in the boat with them. This Jesus who sends them to the unknown of the deep, together they have had an experience, together they have enough to keep their lives going, going well.

This Jesus, though, this Jesus doesn't stop there. It would be an excellent time for a hammock and a fish fry on the beach. They had fished all night after all and then gone out again in the morning. They were tired. This Jesus says to them you are now going to fish for people and our sacred story says they then took their boats back to shore, left everything and followed him.

This Jesus, this love in flesh. This Jesus, who invited people to walk with him. This Jesus, who has healing to offer to those on the margins, there is something about him. His presence. His conviction. His love of God. It's a magnet drawing people to be part of it. He pulls us in and he leads us on a journey.

In this past week there has been a flurry of Executive Orders and pardons. People I love are feeling threatened. The Humanitarian Parole Program which would have given Junior 2 years in the US has been discontinued. Houses of Worship are no longer sensitive/protected locations. Much of how I had understood things worked has been tossed on its side. The ground feels loose beneath me and in that I hear Jesus saying "put out in the deep". I hear Jesus confident

that with him we can be in the unknown, unsettled and chaos and be light, love, hope, compassion in the mess.

That's how it is through out our sacred story. The deep persists. The empire crushes. Power is abused. God remains. God's love restores. God's people gather in community and pursue justice and peace. Jesus was born into a mess and offered a different way. The powers and principalities executed him thinking they could snuff it out but they couldn't. Love goes marching on.

Jesus in the mix. Jesus calling us to leave the familiar. Jesus creating a community of those who follow him. I am so grateful for this truth and so trusting in what that can do in this time of significant transition for me and Main Street Church. I am not without tears and overflowing grief because I have such love for you and have been so honored to be part of a community of such hope and conviction. And yet I hear Jesus calling me away from full time parish ministry and so have tendered my resignation. I will work with leadership to determine a specific date likely late summer. What Jesus has not told me yet is where he is taking me. Or how I will be part of his work when I am not the pastor and teacher of Main Street Church and when I don't have your hearts and souls to be in mutual ministry together? I don't like not knowing. I don't like knowing I will be saying goodbye. I am so very thankful that Jesus is staying close.

Jesus is also in the mix with you and will not let you go. The special congregational meeting we had in October (about the sale of the Parish House for a sober house) was for me, like the huge catch of fish in this morning's story. I listened to thoughtful, respectful conversation about Main Street Church, its vision, its future. I saw spirit filled and incredibly capable leadership in action and I heard Jesus say "they are good, they are thriving, their proverbial nets are overflowing". That is all still true today. This is a vibrant community connected in love and trusting in God. Jesus will walk with you into a future. There will be teams put together for seeking an interim and celebrating our ministry together. There will be someone different in the pulpit (who likely will have better penmanship and may not regularly catch the microphone wire on the car and drop it). Things will be different in the way that God has for making all things new. It doesn't mean its easy or you like it but it does mean you will be ok., even more than ok. It doesn't mean their won't be grief. Jesus will be staying close. Jesus has already called an incredible community together to be this church.

Our reading this morning ends with Simon, James and John leaving everything and following him. It doesn't say what happens just as what happens for you and me is not yet known. I will close with this reflection from Spill the Beans - "Onto paths we have never travelled, you call us. Towards horizons ever stretching, you call us. Through to dawns we have never known, you call us, And we hear. Take our journeys and shape them with heaven, our hopes and invest them with wonder, our longings and fulfill them in each moment, and we will go. Onto boats we have never seen, you call us. Into water we have never sailed, you call us.

Through the nights we have never expected, you call us, and we hear. Take our living and hold us close, our needs and unfold them, our faith and trust what little there is, and we will go. Into a world we have broken, you call us. Into a life we have abused, you call us. Into a history we have never learned from, you call us, and we hear. Take our regrets and love them, our hurts and heal them, our questions and hold them, and we will go. Amen.

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