

Isa. 6:1–8, (9–13)

Ps. 138

1 Cor. 15:1–11

Luke 5:1–11

Deep Discipleship

Goal for the Session

Adults will envision acts of contemporary discipleship evoked by Luke’s story of Jesus bidding the disciples to venture into deeper waters.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 5:1–11

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Gay L. Byron

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WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” David L. Ostendorf

The life-altering power of God’s word—spoken, heard, and heeded—is dynamically evident in this story of call. The word begins to move horizontally—outward and outbound from Jesus. It falls on the ears of crowds hungry for that word; it falls on the ears of Simon and James and John, afraid, amazed, attracted, and ready. Not knowing what lay ahead on that open and uncharted journey from their familiar fishing boats, “they left everything and followed him,” unbound, outward-bound, horizon-bound, captured by a word that they would, in turn, carry “on the ground” among people waiting for it, listening for it.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Howard K. Gregory

The invitation to put out into the deep for a catch provides a sharp contrast to our human penchant for the predictable and the routine. It is an invitation to venture into new ground or new depths, but it also points to new challenges in mission and ministry for the church in every generation. We are challenged to respond to the urgings of God breaking into human lives. In the case of Simon, as for the Christian faced with such a command, there is the realization that the most profound and significant experiences of God and life are not to be found in the safe ways and places. Simon obeys the instruction and is surprised.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Peter Eaton

The NRSV rendering “catching people” masks a dynamism in the Greek that is lost in translation. Jesus is saying to Peter that he will be “taking” or “saving men and women alive” for the kingdom. “To take men and women alive” is a very different image from simply catching them as though they are food to be consumed. So how can the preacher and the community of the body of Christ make Jesus real for others and for ourselves in ways that are both true and genuinely compelling?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 5:1–11

Focus on Your Teaching

Consider recent challenges encountered by the adults in your group and your faith community as a whole. Faced with such experiences, one common response is to withdraw into safe places and predictable routines. But sometimes, such experiences are best met head-on, even when the way forward is not clear beforehand. Today's passage from Luke explores how discipleship emerges in the willingness to step out into uncharted territory. Take care not to assume the age of adults will predetermine responses of withdrawal or risk-taking in the face of life's challenges.

Open me, O God, to the preparations you would have me make for leading this session. In Jesus' name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- photos or artwork of the ocean or deep waters
- Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- recording of sounds of ocean surf, audio player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for February 17, 2019, unless it will be e-mailed to participants

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1
- option 3: colored copier or construction paper, assorted markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange several photos or paintings of oceans or deep water in the center of your meeting space, so they are visible throughout the session.

Welcome participants as they arrive. Form pairs and give the following instructions: Tell your partner about a time when you felt challenged to step out of some comfort zone of yours. Describe the nature of the challenge, the comfort zone being challenged, and why you did or did not choose to step out of it. Encourage adults to listen without judging their partner's response.

Gather the group. Without disclosing the particular experiences themselves, have adults briefly summarize the reasons that worked for or against taking the risk of stepping out of their comfort zone. Say that today's focus scripture describes a challenging invitation Jesus extended to his disciples.

Pray aloud:

God of grace, we come at your invitation to enter into this Word—and in entering, to be opened to your call to us. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

EXPLORING

Form three groups. Assign each group one portion of today's focus scripture: Luke 5:1–3; Luke 5:4–7; Luke 5:8–11. Explain that each small group is to plan and then perform a pantomime to act out its portion of the narrative for the entire group. Affirm that no words, spoken or written, are to be used in the pantomime. Allow adequate time for the groups to prepare.

Have the groups carry out their pantomimes in order of the narrative, without any discussion or response between the sections. When all the pantomimes have been completed, discuss the following:

- ✧ What did the pantomimes as a whole convey about this story?
- ✧ What did each group find most difficult to express in their pantomime; why?

Ask for four volunteers, each of whom will read aloud to the group one of the following portions of the focus scripture: Luke 5:1–3; 4–5; 6–10a (ending with “partners of Simon”); 10b–11 (beginning with “Then Jesus said”).

Have the first volunteer read verses 1–3. Note that Gennesaret is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Invite participants to identify the most important details in these verses for understanding the story as a whole.

Have the second volunteer read verses 4–5. Point out that in ancient Jewish traditions, the “deep (water)” evoked a sense of dread or threat. Such places were seen as in need of God’s intervention in order to control their chaotic danger (see Genesis 1:2). Such places were also feared as the abode of spirits or ghosts (Matthew 14:25–26). Discuss:

- ✧ How does the information about deep water or the sea shape our understanding of what Jesus is asking of the disciples, and what they might have been hearing in Jesus’ call?
- ✧ What kinds of things do you hear Peter expressing in his response to Jesus in verse 6?

Have the third volunteer read verses 6–10a. Relate the information in the sidebar about partners, and discuss:

- ✧ What do you make of Simon calling first on his “partners” to help with the crisis brought about by the catch, rather than calling first to Jesus?
- ✧ What might lead Simon to confess what he does to Jesus rather than saying, “Thanks for the great catch?”
- ✧ Put yourself in the place of Simon’s partners. What might you have said to Jesus when the nets were hauled in full of fish? When the boat began to sink? Why?

Have the fourth volunteer read verses 10b–11. Invite adults to recall other instances where we encounter the words “do not be afraid” in the Bible, and in the life of Jesus in particular. Discuss:

- ✧ What did the banishing of fear intend to accomplish in those other occasions?
- ✧ What does the banishing of fear intend to accomplish in today’s passage?

Read aloud to the group the “So What” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 5:1–11). Invite adults to reflect silently on the following questions:

- ✧ Where might Jesus’ invitation to “put out into the deep water” challenge Jesus’ followers today to venture out into something new?
- ✧ In what ways might such “venturing” be needed in the life of your congregation and the wider church?

The word for “partners” in verse 10 is *koinonos*, deriving from the Greek word that signifies “common.” Even more significantly, it is closely related to the word the New Testament uses to describe Christian community: *koinonia* (Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9)

In the NRSV, “do not be afraid” appears more than sixty times! A few examples are Genesis 15:1; Exodus 14:13; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 1:8; Matthew 1:20; Matthew 28:5, 10; Luke 1:30; Luke 2:10; Luke 12:32; and Acts 18:9.

EASY
PREP

Responding

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Naming Our Deep Waters** Adults will spend time in quiet mediation on how Jesus' invitation to Simon bids us consider acts of discipleship that, like the "deep" of old, may evoke fear or hesitancy. Invite adults to sit comfortably and open themselves to hearing Christ's call to them as you lead the guided meditation, following the directions on Resource Sheet 2 (Naming the Deep Waters before Us). At the meditation's end, provide copies of the resource sheet and encourage participants to repeat the meditation at home in the coming week, continuing to explore the deeper waters of discipleship to which Christ beckons them.
- 2. Safe Harbors and New Challenges** Adults will explore how Jesus' call to venture out into deep waters deals with the attraction of staying in safe harbors. From Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 5:1–11), read aloud the sentence in the "So What" excerpt that begins: "In the case of Simon . . ." Identify the "safe harbors" and "new challenges" operative in Luke 5:1–11, and the connections to "safe harbors" and "new challenges" participants see in their own practice of discipleship. Encourage adults in the coming week to focus on venturing out from one particular "safe harbor" that they feel has been impeding their discipleship.
- 3. Envisioning the Call** Adults will envision acts of contemporary discipleship in light of Jesus' call to venture into the "deep." Set out copier or construction paper and a variety of markers. Invite each participant to create an image or artistic rendering of what, for them, illustrates, envisions, or represents Jesus' call to disciples today to venture into the "deep." Encourage adults to take their artworks home and use them in their devotional practices this week as a reminder of their call to discipleship.

Closing

Play the recorded sound of ocean surf as you gather adults around the images of the ocean and/or deep waters. With the sounds playing, speak the words of Jesus to Simon aloud to the group: "Put out into the deep water" (Luke 5:4). After a moment, discuss:

✠ Where is Jesus asking your discipleship to take you? What is Jesus asking you to do as his disciple?

Turn off the ocean sounds. Speak aloud the following closing charge:

Do not be afraid of the deep. Jesus goes with you. Do not be afraid. Go in peace. Go in courage. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for February 17, 2019, or email it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and resource sheet prior to the next session.

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Naming the Deep Waters before Us

Directions: Find a comfortable posture to sit. Take several deep breaths. On each breath out, silently pray for release from whatever fears you might have at this moment. On each breath in, silently pray for God's Spirit to bring you peace and courage. Allow the following words to guide your thoughts and to open your will to the presence and call of God in Christ. At each "...", pause for reflection.

You are on a quiet beach by yourself, the only sound is the waves lapping at the shore . . .

You see a figure walking toward you down the beach. As he draws closer, you see it is the way you have always envisioned Jesus to look. As you recognize him, you feel . . .

Jesus sits down beside you. Silently, you both look out over the waters, across the shallows near the shore, to the deeper blues that stretch further out . . .

Looking those deeps, you are reminded of places in your faith where you have feared to go . . .

"My child," Jesus says to you, "What do you see?" . . .

You name to him those fears, those hesitations, and what they keep you from risking . . .

"My friend," Jesus says, "do not be afraid. I will go there with you. Do you trust me? . . .

In that moment, you wonder . . .

"My friend," Jesus says, "do not be afraid. Will you follow me there?" . . .

As Christ stands and takes your hand, you stand and say . . .

Repeat the breathing exercise used at the beginning.

