

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11

Whenever I teach a Bible Study, I request one thing of my students and that is to attempt to understand what we are studying by reading the entire book, or letter, in one sitting. Then to help understand the context of a passage of Scripture, I advise them to read what is before and after. Remember, that chapters and verses are relatively new additions to the text, first appearing in the 13th century, So, I think it is important that we briefly look at the context in which we find ourselves in the text. Let's take a "cliff notes" view of the 4th chapter of Luke.

As chapter 4 begins, Jesus has been baptized and had gone off into the wilderness for his time of trial and temptation. He's there for 40 days and nights and the devil attempts to convince him to give up his inherent power as the Son of God and his purpose for ministry as Emmanuel, God with us, for the relief that would come from breaking his fast. But Jesus, tired, suffering from the effects of the 40 day fast, refuses to bend... refuses to yield to the temptation and eventually tells the devil to go back to where he had come from.

When Jesus returns from his wilderness adventure, he begins to preach, to heal and teach as he moves through the countryside. So, when he arrives in his hometown of Nazareth, the people have heard of his deeds and they invite him to teach in the synagogue. It is here that he reads from the scroll of Isaiah, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's*

*favor.*" (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV) and he tells them that on this day, the scripture has been fulfilled. It is when he tells them that all they are wanting is for him to perform the type of miracles that they have heard that he can perform that they turn on him, ready to throw him from the nearest cliff, but he escapes unharmed.

He travels to Capernaum in the region of Galilee where he encounters a man possessed by a demon who loudly proclaims Jesus as the Holy One of God. Jesus commands the demon out of the man and he is healed of this affliction. Jesus then travels to the home of a man named Simon, a fisherman by trade who will figure prominently in the story of Jesus as we move forward. At Simon's home, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law who was suffering from a fever and he continued healing others, sending away demons, and attracting a following of people who were amazed at what was happening as Jesus moved through their communities.

It is in this context that we find ourselves this morning. Jesus is being followed by crowds wherever he is traveling. This morning, we find him at the shore of Genneraset, which is nothing more than another name for the Sea of Galilee. As he walks along the shore, being followed by a crowd of people, he sees a couple of fisherman's boats. He approaches Simon, the owner of one of the boats, and asks him to let him speak to the crowd from his boat. Simon had been fishing all night along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were tired, worn out from fishing all night and disappointed that their hard work yielded no fish. But Simon remembered what Jesus had done to bring peace to his home when Jesus healed his mother-in-law and he agreed. Jesus got into the boat and Simon pushed off from the shore and provided a platform from which Jesus could preach and teach to the crowd.

Jesus knew that the people who were gathering around him and seeking him out had a need to hear what he had to say and to experience the healing miracles that he had to offer. And he did what he needed to do to meet that

need. In a way, it is reminiscent of the time when John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, was cast out from the pulpits in the Church of England, but that didn't deter him. Wesley preached to the crowds standing on the tomb of his father.

We don't know what Jesus said to the crowd that day. Luke doesn't share that message with us. What we know about this day is that once Jesus had finished his message, he turned to Simon and said, "Simon, I know that you've been fishing all night and you didn't catch anything. I know that you're tired, you're disappointed, you're hungry and you probably just want to get the boat and the nets put away, go home and get some rest. But I think that you need to put out into the deep water and put out your nets."

Simon said, "Master, you're right. We've worked hard all night and didn't catch a thing. But, because you ask me to, I will do as you say." And true to his word, he did what Jesus asked and the harvest of fish was plentiful. So plentiful, in fact, that their nets began to break.

We don't know what Jesus preached. What we do know is that the crowd that was following Jesus that day, the crowd that heard him speak from Simon's boat saw an example of faith in action. Simon, remembering what Jesus had done for him and his family acting in faith did what Jesus asked and he was rewarded with a harvest that was filled to overflowing.

But how did Simon and his companions respond? They were professional fisherman. Fishing was their livelihood. They were the experts and they must have been pretty good at it because they owned their own boats and nets. And on this day, after a night of disappointment, it was like they won the jackpot while playing the lottery. But, instead of collecting their winnings, so to speak, instead of cashing in on this tremendous luck and banking a pretty penny by selling this amazing catch of fish, Simon, James, and John left it all behind and followed Jesus. I can imagine that Zebedee, the father of James and John was

amazed at their catch and likely pocketed the profits for them, but he had to wonder what had taken hold of his sons that they would walk away from this bounty to follow an itinerant rabbi who told them that “from now on, you’ll be catching people.”

Their action was a leap of faith. They had no idea what they were getting themselves into. They had no idea where they were going, but they knew that this would be an adventure. They experienced their own transformation that day as they followed Jesus’ direct calling upon their life.

Encountering the Living God in the person of Jesus Christ or in the person of the Holy Spirit, is for all of us, a life-altering experience. We cannot help being changed by the encounter, especially when it begins to work on us, to mold us and make us into the people that Christ calls us to be.

In Christ, we experience a newness of life that gives us a purpose that we have never had before. A purpose that invites us to go into the world, into our community, and share the message of God’s love and grace for each of one of us. We are made in God’s image, we are God’s daughters and sons, and, as members of God’s family, we are invited into an inheritance the like of which we can’t even begin to imagine.

This invitation is to all of us. It is not hindered by age, or by infirmity. However, it is an invitation that can be denied if we listen to the excuses that roam around in our heads urging us to turn away from our calling. God through Jesus invites and the Holy Spirit encourages and empowers, but we have the final say about how, or even if, we will respond. But our lack of response is not for any lack of provision from God. We are given all that we need to be successful. With the encouragement and support of the Holy Spirit, we have more than we need to be successful... if we will just try. But the excuses of the day stand in the way of us making a difference in the lives of people right here in Rossville. It’s not like the efforts of people in this church are not making a

difference in people's lives. They are. From the monthly Free Store to the weekly Simple Supper and Bible Study, to the Coats for Kids, School involvement, and hunger ministries, we are making a difference. But, can we do more? I believe that we can and I believe that God is calling us to being a place where people can experience the life changing transformation that comes through an encounter with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

On March 2, 1972, the Pioneer 10 spacecraft was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Its estimated 2 year mission was to provide a close up glimpse of the planet Jupiter to help us understand better the origins of our universe and the makeup of the planets in our solar system. Pioneer 10 performed admirably. It was the first earth object to traverse the asteroid belt separating the inner planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars) from the outer planets. It not only provided detailed photographs and analysis of conditions around Jupiter, as designed, but it continued with it's experiments and telemetry of the data that it collected for 31 and 3/4 years. Contact was lost with the spacecraft on January 23, 2003 when, at a distance of 7.44 billion miles from Earth, there was no longer enough power for the 8 watt transmitter. That's less about the power of an incandescent night light.

Just goes to show you that when you think that you don't have what it takes to live out the calling that God has placed upon your life, when you don't think that you have the energy or the strength, you can go above and beyond what you have using the power that God gives you through the Holy Spirit and you can make a difference, a life transforming difference, in your own life and others through Christ.

We can make a difference when we see the people, all of the people.

God is calling. How do we respond?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.