

## “Jesus and Our Doubt”

Are you a planner? That is, are you the kind of person who charts out what will happen? Do you make lists, set goals, line up the strategies that will bring into being whatever it is you are hoping for? Do you prepare, cover all the contingencies? Or, are you the kind of person who takes life as it comes? Those with this type of personality go with the flow. They don't sweat the details as much and they are comfortable reacting in the moment. Taking this approach usually means life brings more surprises. It's more about being in the moment as opposed to preparing for the next moment. Which way is more you? Most of us are probably a healthy mix of both. I use a small pad of paper where I jot down things to do, listing plans for the day or week, and I like to check them off as I go along but I also appreciate, most of the time, the unexpected, little surprises in life. I find that if my life gets too scripted or too predictable I start wondering if I'm missing the sweet blessings that just emerge along the way. So, I think I'm a person who likes to plan but also has the capacity to embrace whatever may pop up. I bet most of us are that way. We're a blending of setting goals and making lists but also leaving room to experience life when it just happens in spite of our best laid plans.

Jesus was like us, in the sense that he was both aware of the path God had for his life and had the ability to respond to needs or opportunities in the moment. We can be sure of this because Jesus, as the gospel makes clear, was filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was Spirit fed. He was Spirit led, and this meant that while he was clear about God's purpose for his life he also responded to the blowing winds of the Spirit which often carried him into unpredictable situations. The reality of God emerges along the way. And so, like with Jesus, the reality of God is not something we plan or control. God's reality emerges in life and it requires our response.

As we come to the 5th chapter of Luke's Gospel, we learn Jesus was standing by the sea one day. The story says a crowd of people started pressing in on him. This was not a planned rally. This was not a scheduled event or some agreed upon speech where Jesus was expected to deliver a particular message to a particular group. Instead, Jesus is just walking the shoreline and the opportunity suddenly appears to communicate the reality of God's kingdom. He stopped to teach because the people were there and they were ready to listen. It wasn't a planned thing. We're told the fishermen had pulled their boats from the water and were busy cleaning their nets. They were wrapping up a frustratingly futile night of fishing. They'd caught nothing. Jesus, seeing the empty boats decides to use one of them as a floating teaching platform. It all has the feel of responding in the moment and taking whatever the moment has to give. This is an example of how the Spirit in Jesus used an unexpected opportunity to make God known in the lives of people.

When we read the bible we have a tendency to move too quickly. We hear the verses of scripture for the morning and then move to our usual response, “The Word of God for the people of God” and in our haste can miss the gift the Spirit wants us to receive. So, let's slow down for a moment. Luke tells us Jesus was standing there and the time became right for him to open the hearts of those gathered to what God was doing. On Sunday mornings we gather in this sanctuary and we hear the bible read and that is one way of listening for God. But I think an even more powerful way is to be open to how God speaks to us in the flow of our lives. It happened then along the shoreline. God speaks and the winds of the Spirit blow. It just happens. It happens when we walk along the path of life. It happens when we are with our families or at our places of work or moving through our day. These are opportunities to listen for and respond to God. And, this isn't something we can plan or control. We don't schedule an appointment to listen for God. Instead, it is about being ready to hear what God is saying whenever the sound of God's voice emerges in our lives. Like today's reading where Jesus is walking by the sea, we must stay vigilant as we go along. We ask, “Lord, where are you just now? Is this a moment what is the lesson of faith that connects to my life?” You see, Jesus, who is always with us, is ready to teach. Now, in our lives Jesus doesn't use the platform of a floating boat but he may use the platform of some experience we're sharing with our spouses, or some struggle we're having with one of our children or grandchildren, or the experience of a serious health concern or a work situation that is getting the best of us. These life experiences and so many others we could name become the platform from which Jesus speaks God's word to us, opening us to God's particular call in our lives in that moment. Jesus was just standing beside the sea and the crowd, the boats, the worn out fishermen, the frustration and weariness of Peter and the others, all of this provided the context for God's presence and power to be known. What is the context in your life out of which God is calling you to a deeper experience of faith?

The crowd watched as Jesus told Simon Peter and the other fishermen to put the nets back in the water and try again. Let's place a mental bookmark right there. Save that for future reference. Jesus connected with Peter in the midst of his frustration and weariness. Have you ever been frustrated? Have you ever been weary? [Preacher, do you

mean today?!? Is there ever a day when this doesn't happen?] Jesus would not let Peter give up. The result of Jesus' encouragement of Peter was a catch of fish that was beyond anything he'd ever seen. Again, put a mental bookmark right there. Come back to this whenever you need it. Peter thought he'd already given it his all. Why try again? Peter's doubt was as deep as the water in which he was dropping his nets. And yet, despite his doubt, Peter hears Jesus and responds to him. We want to mark this, too. We convince ourselves that God would never decide to use my life or be active in my life until I get my act together. We think we have to have strong faith before God will show any interest in us. Peter was deep in doubt when God took hold of him. Peter wasn't a bible expert. Peter wasn't on a spiritual retreat. He wasn't constantly praying for God's will to be done. No, Peter was holding empty nets. He was trying to make ends meet. He was struggling to survive a really tough day, and that's when Christ showed up. Let's keep track of the markers we've placed in our minds this morning. It was in his deep doubt that Jesus connected with Peter. It was in his futility and weariness that Jesus encouraged him. It was Peter's capacity to hear Jesus and respond that made the miracle catch possible. God doesn't need much room to move into our hearts. There's a place in the bible that talks about faith the size of a mustard seed and what God can do with that. So, wherever we are, weary, frustrated, full of doubt or ready to give up, Jesus is there and God calls to us to trust one more time.

We might think this is the end of the story, the fishermen making their way back to the shore with nets and boats so full they could barely manage it all. Well, it wasn't the end. More to the point, it was a sort of beginning. Peter fell to his knees at the feet of Jesus and acknowledged his doubt and fear. "I'm a sinner," he says. "Lord, you'll want to stay far away from the likes of me." Mark this. Jesus told Peter God was going to use his life to catch people, to gather people into the net of God's love and grace. From that moment, Peter lives as a follower of Christ. Do you wonder how Peter could just walk away from the biggest catch he'd ever seen? I think it's because his boat wasn't the only thing that got filled up that day. A net full of fish wasn't the only thing that was caught. Peter became filled with the presence of Jesus. Peter's life was filled with the love and mercy and forgiveness of Christ and this became the new way for his life.

In weariness, in frustration, in doubt and in sin, God calls us to a life that is full in Christ. Be ready. We never know when God will suddenly emerge, fill us with love and grace, and call us to follow a new way.