

February 10, Epiphany 5C (Luke 5:1-11; Isaiah 6:1-8, 9-13)

Jesus calls Peter. But there's a catch.

Sunday's Coming Premium

January 16, 2019

My husband loves to mow the grass, because it's satisfying to see the result. He loves to put things together—fences, landscaping projects, car mechanicals, computer hardware. For him, the end result is always guiding the work. Where I see a jumble of wood cuts and tools that surround him while he's at work, he sees the beautiful finished product that these will become. What I see as a bunch of tiny screws and parts strewn on the garage floor, he sees as the working machine they will become. My husband is motivated by what he knows will be the culmination of his hard work.

I wonder how people like my husband would react if they were given instructions with no solid idea of the end result. What would happen if we were told exactly what to do, but not why?

In our reading from Luke this week, Jesus essentially calls Simon to a project without clear results. "Put out into the deep water," he says, "and let down your nets for a catch." There is no indication of what this catch will be. A good one? Just adequate, or abundant? A catch that feeds one family, or one that feeds a whole village? The call to Simon is clear and simple: put out your net. But the result is difficult to even imagine. A catch seems fairly impossible, given that the fishermen have already been fishing all night and have caught nothing. To cast nets again—this time in deep water, which most likely means a bit more work and time—does not seem promising.

But there's a catch. Jesus is at work.

Simon's reaction to the call and command of Jesus is one of disbelief, distrust, and a little bit of defensiveness. Simon says, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." He is quick to tell Jesus what he knows, because it is difficult for him to imagine what he does not know. Yet, perhaps more out of resignation than trust, he lets down the nets anyway. And after hauling in the nets filled with

multitudes of fish—so many fish that the nets are beginning to break—Simon Peter confesses to Jesus that his sin prevented him from trusting in what Jesus could do.

Instead of calling out Peter's unbelief, Jesus simply responds, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Instead of focusing on Peter's lack of trust, Jesus highlights the continual call to catch, even when the results are a mystery to us.

Much of life exists between the work and the result. Young adults work toward a retirement they cannot see. Will they become ill in their fifties and forfeit their savings for end-of-life care? No one knows. Young children go to school and stack up their extracurriculars for years in order to be considered successful in society. Will they go to college upon graduation, or will life circumstances lead them on a different path? No one knows. We rarely, if ever, are promised a clear result to our work.

But that doesn't seem to matter to Jesus. When he asks Simon to put out into the deep water, he merely asks Simon to do what Simon knows how to do. Nothing more, nothing less. Simon is a fisherman. He knows just how to cast nets for a catch. He knows the sea and the life within it. He knows how to do this; it is the work he has been equipped to do. So this time, when Jesus asks Simon to do his job, the result—the catch—is left to Jesus.

In the Isaiah reading, we hear another call to simply go—without knowledge of what may come or how everything will end. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God asks. Send where? To do what? This call elicits many clarifying questions.

But Isaiah, without question or curiosity about the end result (or even what the journey will look like), responds with enthusiasm: "Here am I; send me!" It seems that the call to follow the Lord is a call with no end in sight. In this case, Isaiah isn't even told what to do exactly; he is just called to go. The simple fact that he is here, that he exists, is enough for him to serve as an integral part of God's mission.

Like Isaiah, like Simon Peter, and like all the others who go before us, we are called in the midst of our daily lives to serve in God's mission for the world. Cast your nets, write your papers, teach your students, balance financial accounts, design the buildings, pour the concrete, make the lattes, lead the meetings, administer the IVs, answer the phones, sing the arias. Do what you know how to do, and Jesus will use it to draw others into the kingdom of God.

Rarely does God reveal to us our destination. Instead, God reveals to us the means through which we are called to participate in God's end result. While we do what we are created, equipped, and skilled to do, we entrust the result to God.

Because when it comes to God's call, there's always a catch.