

The logo features a stylized red flame or leaf shape on the left, partially overlapping a black cross. The text "United Methodist Church of Red Bank" is written in a clean, sans-serif font to the right of the graphic.

United Methodist Church of Red Bank

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Respond to the Call

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Jesus has been very busy since we left off in the story last week... only 14 verses separate the two, but a lot can go down in only 14 verses! He's been traveling from town to town in Judea, teaching in the synagogues, casting out demons and healing the sick, including Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus has developed quite a reputation, and everyone wants to come see him and hear him teach. Our story picks up when Jesus is just standing there on the shoreline of the Lake of Gennesaret... otherwise known as the Sea of Galilee. And the people are crowding in on him! On the shore with him is Simon and his crew, just back from a night of fishing, tired and disappointed from a fruitless night of work. He hops in Simon's boat to get a short distance away from the crowd that is pressing in on him and sets up a natural amphitheater, sits down and begins teaching from the comfort of the boat.

Once the lesson is over, and we presume the nets that Simon's crews were cleaning on the shoreline are neatly folded up, ready for the next night's work... Jesus has the audacity to ask Simon to push out into the deep water and let down their nets for a catch. Now there's a few things I want to draw your attention to that make Luke's telling of this story so great... that speak to me, and I imagine to all of us.

Tired

First, I invite you to notice WHEN it is that Jesus invites Peter to let down his nets once more. To give it another try... Is it when he's well rested? After a good night's sleep? When he and his crew are in great spirits, feeling great about their accomplishments, without a care in the world? NO! It's when they're coming home after a long night shift with empty hands... when they're discouraged and bone tired, probably worried about how they would pay the bills and maybe even, feed their families. Jesus says, come out with me, let's try it again together.

We know tired! We know discouraged! We know what it's like in our lives, in our work, in our relationships, to feel like you've given it your all and you're just ready to call it quits! I love that this is exactly when Jesus turns and says, hey, take me out with you... let's try it one more time. Is it a little frustrating sometimes, yes... and you can even hear that in Peter's initial response... "Master, we have worked all night long, but we have caught nothing." And I imagine him pausing and just letting that hang in the air... waiting for Jesus to relent, to let him off the hook (pun intended), before he finally gives in "Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets."

I hear this as Jesus' encouragement to not give up in those moments when you just want to call it quits... I hear Jesus's unspoken words of encouragement - give it another try... know that I am with you. It's written in such a way that I can pull up this mental picture of Jesus cheering me on for another round, especially on those days that I am dog tired!

Invitation into deeper water

The second thing I invite you to notice in this story is how Jesus invites Simon and his crew to move from the shallow water out into the deep. Now if you know anything about fishing in a lake, you don't really want to get too far out in the deep waters... because that's not where the fish are! While I've never fished with a big net like they did, my grandfather always had us cast our lines near the shoreline, near a downed tree or if we did cast out on the other side of the boat, we were instructed to reel the line in slowly, allowing the lure to drop down a-ways, so it get's near the bottom where the fish are. Heading out into the deep of Lake Gennesaret, I can't even imagine how far down the bottom would be in that lake that stretched out so far that you couldn't see to the other side.

So, what is Luke trying to say? Well, if you know the creation story back in Genesis chapter one, you might be familiar with that phrase, "the deep". In the creation account, "the deep" was the chaos that existed before God made order of it all. The chaos, the unpredictable, the places where we feel most vulnerable. I think Luke is suggesting to his readers, that for us to really give it our all in life, we need to be willing to move away from the shallow – the ordinary, the predictable, what is safe, what is "known" – and move out into

the deep waters of our faith, of our life, being willing to use our gifts, our resources even on those things we might label “chaos”, “unpredictable”, most vulnerable...

We just commissioned 11 new members of our Pastoral Care Team, and let me tell you, for most, if not all of them, this feels like going out into the deep! We have trained together, and will continue to learn new skills each month, but this is a courageous act of faith that each of them said YES to in a new ministry that they felt called to serve with. I commend them for their courage and willingness to serve, and invite all of us to keep our eyes open for those places that God might be calling you to step out from the comfort of the shallow, and move out into the challenge of the deep.

Catch – “saving people alive”

Last, I invite you to hear again and know the original meaning of the text when Jesus says to Peter, “from now on you will be catching people.” If we follow through with the analogy of catching fish and apply it to people --- that doesn't really sound like good news for the people being caught. After all, aren't they typically caught so they can become someone's dinner? Let me share with you the meaning of the original Greek word that Luke uses here... it doesn't mean to entrap for the purpose of devouring. Rather it means, “saving people alive” – not food to be consumed, but fully alive – abundant life, as Jesus teaches about later. This type of catching is not for the benefit of the fisher, rather it is for the benefit of the one who has been caught!

Friends, this is the kind of catching that we too are called to experience in our own lives, and to offer to others. I believe deep in my bones that we have something wonderful here at this church, something that sets us apart from other churches. We know and LIVE the love of God, made known to us in Jesus. Are any of us perfect, NO... Do we make mistakes at times... YES! But because LOVE is the heart of our gospel, we know and trust that God's grace abounds for us and for others. We accept and offer grace, forgiveness, and second chances over and over again – to ourselves and our neighbors. We are a church that is so deeply grounded in the love of God that we are not willing to turn our God given brains off when we walk through the door! We use our hearts AND our thinking minds to transform religion – the kind of religion that unfortunately been used to harm and hold people back – we love BIG enough to transform that religion into love!

Friends, this is the kind of good news that we need to be caught up in... that we are called to share with others... that we need to be fishers of people with – because this is the kind of good news that our world needs right now, and always! It is my prayer this week, that you would go to listen for the ways God is calling you to share LOVE, to dare to go deep – even when you're tired and discouraged – so that you, and those you encounter – might know the life-giving love of God. May we all be such fishers of people. Amen!