

**“QUALIFYING THE UNQUALIFIED”**

Luke 5: 1-11

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**Canada Day:** Wednesday was beautiful for celebrating Canada’s birthday! A day off in the middle of week is something very special. We bicycled around London, went out for an ice cream, played tennis and watched The City of London’s fireworks display. It was awesome!

But what are we celebrating? My daughter piped up saying that we did nothing to deserve our Canadian citizenship. Everyone she was addressing in the conversation was born in this land of opportunity and peace. Keeping that in mind, our celebration should then be a thanksgiving festival. However, when our Canada Day event is less about thanksgiving and more about entitlement, we can move into the fear mode--working towards protecting ourselves from strangers and limiting foreigners coming to our great land. Certainly there needs to be a comprehensive screening process, but always keeping in mind that our identity should be first and foremost about the reality that we are all loved children of God – citizens of God’s Kingdom. I believe our celebration should be focused on thanksgiving and on wanting to share this great land with other children of God who need a new home because of limited opportunity and persecution experienced in their home country.

**Living by script:** We are all born in a certain country, in a family and in circumstances we did not choose. We have been born on a continuum of being highly privileged to have little or no privileges. We have been given a script so to speak, that shapes in large part how our life will be. For example, if born in extreme poverty, it will be very difficult to change that inherited position with its limited opportunities and resources. In our scripture reading this morning, we read about fishermen who were born and raised as poor uneducated citizens. At that time in history, societal mobility was limited. In this context, this new preacher and teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, comes and changes these fishermen’s lives.

**A surprising event-a miracle!** This miraculous event of this huge catch of fish was so extraordinary that it could not have been relegated to luck. It was seen by Peter and the others as an epiphany of the nature of God through this prophet Jesus Christ. What was equally extraordinary is that this Jesus performs this miracle with a catch of fish – a mundane daily activity of lowly, insignificant individuals in society. If this important rabbi pays attention to and validates the work of such nameless people in society, who are they to refuse to follow him? Similarly, as insignificant our vocations may seem in our contemporary context, God cares about and wants to be in command of our lives, our work lives, our family lives and our leisure lives.

**Downward mobility:** When the net is breaking from the huge haul of fish, Peter is fearful of the boat sinking and awestruck by the power of this man Jesus. Peter then states in verse 8,

“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Jesus responds in verse 10 by saying, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people.” Peter’s statement of calling himself a sinner is the key to him becoming a disciple. In other words, followers of Christ are to be humble in character and when they are wrong or mistaken to be in the habit of admitting it (confessing one’s sins). Peter’s words, “I am a sinful man, opens the door for Jesus to engage Peter for his Kingdom.

In contemporary western society, the culture encourages us to be wealthy and famous, seeking upward mobility in society. Jesus on the other hand, asks his followers to be humble, putting one’s personal status and mobility secondary—focusing rather on the needs of others and not forgetting those who are suffering (locally and internationally). Jesus practiced downward mobility when he went into the boat of the common fisherman Peter, James and John’s.

**Personal happiness:** In our individualistic society, we are encouraged through marketing and attitudes of peers to be preoccupied with ourselves and how we look and how we feel. Personal happiness falls into this category. A few weeks ago, I was listening to a CBC interview where the guest in the interview stated that we live in a culture that places a very high value on personal happiness. For example, the guest stated that people may find themselves feeling dissatisfied in their marriages, and they believe since they are not happy and fulfilled they should leave the marriage. In fact, the thinking is that it is better for the children if the parent is happy, therefore when one is not happy in their marriage relationship, the marriage should end for the benefit of all. The guest pointed out that the statistics do not support this attitude. The research consistently points to the fact that children are far more negatively affected if the parents split up than if they stay together and are not happy or lacking personal fulfillment.

Downward mobility where the primary focus in life is off oneself and on to the need of others is the way towards healing for the world, and the way of the Kingdom of God. Jesus stated in John 13: 34, 35, *“I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are to love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* This kind of love is sacrificial love, the kind of love that puts oneself aside for the sake of the other.

**You are qualified!** You are qualified to work for God’s Kingdom! Remember you are not complete on your own, regardless of whatever script you may have in life. Put your trust in the Lord, and he will qualify you to spread the news of genuine love – regardless of how insignificant or how unworthy you may feel. Perhaps you have experienced failure in your life like Peter, James and John who did not catch a thing that day. In spite of this, Jesus says, *“Put out into the deep waters, and let down your nets.”* And then like Peter we say that we have already done that and nothing came of it. But it dawns on us after these words came out of Peter’s mouth that it was different this time because Jesus is now in the boat. And that makes all the difference. Amen.