

## WONDER-FULL

### 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.

### Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. Come to us, and we shall be made, and you will renew the face of the earth. Amen.

At the end of his novel, *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes his narrator onto a beach at night, lying sprawled out in the sand; the narrator casting his mind back to the moment the Dutch

Sailors who were out on the water would have first seen what would become New York. “For a transitory enchanted moment, man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.” And that is a very good sentence.

It’s also a very long sentence. And I think that I understand almost all of it. But the part that really gets me is the end: “...face to face for the last time with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.” I’m something of a sucker for wonder and awe and enchantment, the whole bit. One of my favorite things to do is to read books about, or listen to podcasts, SLASH a very specific AM radio show that plays from 12 AM to 5 AM Eastern Standard Time on the topic of the paranormal and the unexplained. (Which is obviously very fun and cool and normal, but I don’t have to tell you that.)

What fascinates me about this kind of stuff is that it is, categorically, out of the ordinary and the everyday; it’s unexpected and (really only sometimes) unexplained. It activates some sense of wonder within me, and it’s enchanting. I sometimes tell people that Ghosts are some of my favorite things in the whole world and I have no idea if they’re real. I’m not really interested in whether or not they’re real; I am simply enchanted by the idea that a series of events, or occurrences can come together in such a way, that a person, or a group of people, find in themselves the capacity for wonder, such that they believe in something so fantastic and outside the ordinary and the everyday.

I’m going to tip my hand a little bit here and let you know that I am not taking a weird approach this morning and I have not decided to preach to you on the reality or fantasy of ghosts, or aliens, or Bigfoot, or anything like that. That would be an odd move. This is my second sermon with y’all. I can’t to be doing that kind of thing just yet.

What I am doing here is trying to get us to see that there is, within all of us, because we’re human, this capacity for wonder, if we’re open to it. And that this sense of wonder, brought on by unexplained phenomena, or mountain vistas, or staring up at the night sky, or standing on a beach and seeing the ocean stretch to every horizon in your line of sight...or even videos of a fish driving little fish-operated-vehicles, whatever it is that engenders within us this sense of wonder, however small, can be the sort of something that hits us deep, somewhere behind our chests. And these can be the sorts of moments that make us want to live the rest of our lives, or, as Frederick Buechner puts it, “at least the rest of that day, in a way that is somehow true to that little scrap of wonder” we have been fortunate enough to see.

The two passages that we read this morning, our gospel reading from Luke and the Vision from the Prophet Isaiah are two CLASSIC call narratives. This is a whole genre in Biblical Studies, where ordinary people are found, wherever they are, and are shown wonderful, confusing, things that are outside the realm of their ordinary lives and are called by God to go forth from that moment, renewed, transformed. These sorts of stories and moments are fascinating because these people, these ordinary people with day jobs, are suddenly shown that the fabric of their carefully put-together reality, is not as they once thought it was and now they have to deal with it.

And the thing about callings and call narratives is that they're so often bound up into this idea of "Vocation"; which makes perfect sense, as the word "Vocation" (originally *Vocare*, for you Latin lovers out there) MEANS "calling". So it's easy to think about "Vocation" in terms of what we do to make sure the lights stay on, and not necessarily in terms of who God is calling us to be, or how God is calling us to live. But in these two call narratives from this morning, God gives to these ordinary people, people who already have jobs that keep the lights on, a moment that is "commensurate to their capacity for wonder."; not to give them a new job, or a new life... but so that they might live the lives they already have, differently, in a way that is somehow true to that scrap of wonder that they were lucky enough to have beheld.

In Isaiah's vision, he is before the throne of God, surrounded by angels, terrifying angels with six wings apiece, veiled faces, and, according to one commentary I consulted, potentially serpentine bodies and possibly burning. Seraphim, these types of angels, different than other ones, are giant, possibly on-fire, flying snakes with six wings shouting about the Glory of God... Truly could not be further from a Precious Moments Angel. And honestly, as an aside, I kept that last bit in there so we could share this moment of weird wonder with each other. And because I couldn't let y'all get out of here without knowing what I know about these potentially flaming snake angels. I refuse to be the only one.

But the lede that I have, for artfully, now buried is that this scene in the life of Isaiah does not occur at the start of his prophetic ministry. This is the sixth chapter! He's been a prophet for 5 whole chapters before this! He had a life! A whole life, and a whole job! And then this happens!! And what does he do? After moaning about his own insufficiencies to even be present for this spectacle; after answering "Me" to the Almighty's question about "who will go?"; he goes. And he keeps living his life. And he keeps doing his job. And he does both in such a way that are "somehow

true to that scrap of wonder” that he witnessed. (Maybe more than a scrap in his case, ‘cause that vision was kind of a lot)

In the Gospel reading from Luke, some of the folks who are about to become disciples are tired and ready to pack it in for the day. Jesus tells Peter, a fisherman, to try for one more catch and Peter says, “alright fine, but only because YOU asked.” They end up with so much fish that the boats are starting to sink, and Peter freaks out and tells Jesus that he has to get out of here because Peter can’t be around him. Jesus, patently refusing, with a standard “do not be afraid,” then charges them to go and “catch people.” Yes, their lives are forever changed by this miracle, this sign, this “scrap of wonder,” but they don’t go out and live completely different lives. They live renewed lives. They’re still fishing, just like they were before, but in a renewed way. In a way that bears witness to the reality of the present and coming Kingdom of God.

These signs and scraps of wonder seem obvious to us when we read about them in the Scriptures, and for good reason: they’re meant to be. And it can be difficult to believe that we see the same sorts of things in our own lives, at all. But, the truth of it is that we bear witness to wonders all the time. We are on a rock, a very BIG rock, hurtling through space, doing loops around a flaming ball of gas, while a smaller rock, still a very big rock, hurtles around US! And there are human beings alive today that have set foot on that smaller-but-still-very-big rock! That is wild! We, as a species, possess the intellect and ability to build machines and send them out into the great, vast void of space, to see what the origins of the universe looked like, and we’ve done it! THAT is wild! There is a fish out there that knows how to drive! And Christine wants to get one for the lobby! WILD! Our lives are brimming with wonder, if we open ourselves up to seeing it. They’re saturated with these moments of it, and that is a gift, if we know how to look.

I’m not trying to say that every single thing that we find mildly interesting or unexpected needs to be a sign from on High. What I am saying is that the things that stir wonder within us, move us to joy, and get us, even just a little bit, in that spot somewhere behind our chests, are things that we ought to take note of, and let those things, those tiny or enormous, beautiful, wonderful things call us to live our lives, or at least the rest of that day in a way that’s true to them. I don’t think that we need to flip our lives 180 degrees around and live completely new lives, such that we are unrecognizable to the people that we were before we saw a cool cat video. I do however, think that when we are lucky enough to be moved by something out of the ordinary, something wonderful, we allow it to draw us up in wonder, to the greatest wonder that there is:

That we are loved, eternally, unchangingly, just as we are, by Almighty God, the maker of Heaven and Earth, of all that is seen and all that is unseen, and that this God came to us, as one of us, and died a death at the hands of people who had no power over him, walked free from a grave that could not hold him, and is coming again in power and glory to make all things new. This is the greatest wonder. And our calling, our highest calling, is to live our lives, our same lives differently: caring for the poor, loving one another when we really don't want to, caring for creation; in short, following the way of Jesus. We are called to be a people who live our lives differently, in a way that is true to this miraculous wonder that we fortunate enough to behold.

Amen.