

Even though Simon follows Jesus, he doesn't feel worthy. Jesus will call him the Rock, Petros in Greek, or Peter as we know him. He will be the one on whom the church will be built, but he feels more like shifting sand. He doesn't see himself as Jesus does. Listen.

Luke 5:1-11

¹Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He 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. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So 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. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and 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." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Leading up to this text, Jesus was baptized, tempted, preached, angered folks, healed folks, and cast out demons in rapid succession. His fame is spreading. Soon after these events, he finds himself on the shoreline surrounded by overwhelming crowds.

Jesus sees the fishermen done for the day, washing their nets. He knows Simon Peter, as he had just healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law. And I think Jesus knows James and John as well since they are in business with Simon Peter. So, as he gets in the boat, he says to Simon Peter, "Push out a way so I can talk to these people."

After teaching, Jesus says to Simon, "Let's go out to the deeper water and fish." Simon sighs. "Really? We have been out all night and have caught nothing, and we are real

fishers, not carpenters,” he thinks. He really doesn’t want to do it. “Do I have to,” he whines. “Yes.” He relented with an, “Okay, if you say so, we’ll try it.”

Boom! They were overwhelmed with so many fish. James and John came rushing, as well. Simon Peter was overcome with emotion and cried, “Go away, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” When I hear this, I think of Wayne and Garth of *Wayne’s World* declaring “we’re not worthy, we’re not worthy” when meeting Alice Cooper or Aerosmith. It is humorous, but it’s not funny in Simon Peter’s case. He doesn’t think he is up to being with Jesus.

He really thinks he is not worthy of being in Jesus’ presence. Yet, he is there and has been with him, but the tape rolling through his head sounds like this. “Jesus will discover I am no good, I am a failure, phony, and fraud, and it’s all going to come out. I will be exposed.”

It’s a demon that afflicts religious and nonreligious people all the time. It is called “imposter’s syndrome.” People feel like phonies at the office, civic organizations, in families, and church. They fear the truth of their unworthiness will come out.

Simon Peter is worried Jesus will see him for who he thinks he is, someone who doesn’t even deserve to be around Jesus. But, of course, Jesus believes differently, and we don’t know just what he said to Simon Peter. Still, it was probably like those powerful gospel words, “Do not be afraid. I know you, call you, love you, and I have more in store for you.” These words are almost impossible to resist.

For the moment, knowing they were affirmed by Jesus meant the world to Simon Peter, James, and John. They left the abundance of fish with their boats and went with Jesus. They left everything and followed him. However, the old doubt would resurface for Peter later.

Okay, I get it; maybe we aren’t going to give up everything and follow Jesus. But isn’t there a bunch of stuff we would like to let go of in our lives? I was at a Zoom meeting of the Presbytery anti-racism task force, and our leader started with, “As the new year begins, what would you like to let go of and what would you like to grow into?” After all the majestic pronouncements, I felt a little leery of saying that what I wanted to let go of was clutter. I am drowning in stuff, both actual and metaphorical. So then I added I wanted to grow into being more empathetic.

I can see Simon Peter, James, and John being ready to leave. They worked so hard every day, and even though they had a miraculous catch, who would be Johnny on the Spot? The tax agents are ready to take the Empire's excessive cut. All that work, and we can't even enjoy a fair share of the fruits of our labors.

So Jesus offered something attractive. They were already attracted to him. We know that just before this, he had healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law. They knew he was not just an ordinary person. They began to take him at his word that indeed he was at least a true holy one of God. And although they didn't grasp just who he was, something was attracting them, and he wanted them to have what he offered.

What is it that Jesus offered that resonated with those first disciples and with us? He provides a chance to be a part of something greater than ourselves. He gives us a chance to make a difference, not only in our lives, but in the world. We have a chance to make the world a better place than we found it. It was something beyond an abundance of fish or wealth; it was abundant life. And Jesus offers that to us today. "Follow me," he calls.

If we drill down on the Scouting, isn't that like what they call young people and their leaders to; to live beyond themselves, be a part of something, and make a difference in the world? They strive to leave people and the world better off than they found them. They offer a path to growth and meaning.

That's what Jesus calls us to. Jesus, who beckons us to follow when he calls. Make a difference and leave the world better than you found it. But sometimes, like Simon Peter, we feel reluctant, even fearful of seriously following Jesus. We fear we are not qualified to accept Jesus' call to us. Like Simon Peter, we may suffer a bit of that imposter syndrome. We believe that our outer and inner lives don't match up so well. We are not that holy; we are less than what we let on. Now, this is not just humility. It is fear that we don't and we won't measure up. Some insecurity or shaming event from our past whispers in our ear and tells us, "Get real, you phony!"

One graduate student in a highly prestigious eastern university paints a good picture of this imposter syndrome. He put it this way, "I feel that, at any moment, someone is going to tap me on the shoulder and tell me there was a mistake in the application process. I was admitted by mistake. I'll have to leave because I don't belong."

This was totally in his head. He was doing superior work that often brought acclaim to form the highest levels, but still, he felt he didn't belong.

I know I, too, face this from time to time. Our Presbytery has honored me by asking me to serve as co-chair of the Committee on Ministry and as chair of our Presbytery Council. These are two of the three most essential assignments in our Presbytery. I stepped up to the challenge, but sometimes inside, I wondered what am I doing here. You can't do this. You don't belong here. It's a mistake. These positions are supposed to be filled by those tall-steeple, talented, and skilled ministers. I am in over my head. It took a lot of self-talk and Jesus-trust and prayer to help me remember I did belong. One phrase came to me from beyond; it came from my old days as a powerlifter. "You got this!"

Jesus has words for us, gospel words, "Fear not, you got this." He knows who we are, and he knows we don't always feel we measure up to his high calling. But you know what else he knows? We are better than we give ourselves credit for. We are more than we think, and if we stop being afraid and let him deeper into our lives, we will find out how much more we really are.

Now Simon Peter did get things wrong, and the tape played and he did not quite understand, and the tape played. He denied Jesus that fateful night of his betrayal. I'm sure after that night, the tape plays again, and he knows he is unworthy and a fraud. I hear the line from an old Moody Blues song, "Never Comes the Day."

If only you knew what's inside of me now, you wouldn't want to know me

Sometimes that tape plays for us as well... fake, phony fraud.

But after the resurrection, Jesus meets Simon Peter at a fish fry and lets him know he is forgiven. He is still the Rock on which the church will be built. Remember, he denied Jesus three times in the courtyard.

John 21 puts it this way:

¹⁵ When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”¹⁶ Jesus asked a second time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Simon replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Take care of my sheep.”¹⁷ He asked a third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, “Do you love me?” He replied, “Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”¹⁸ I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don’t want to go.”¹⁹ He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, “Follow me.”

And I think this loving affirmation finally gets through to him and lets him know that he is The Rock on which Jesus builds the church. Peter goes on to be a leader in the early church. Jesus didn’t see him as an imposter but saw him as the real deal. And he doesn’t see us that way too; we are the real deal. He sees us with God’s eyes.

We are not fakes, frauds, or phonies. We are people created in the image of God. As Psalm 8 puts it:

what are human beings

that you think about them;

what are human beings

that you pay attention to them?

⁵You’ve made them only slightly less than divine,

crowning them with glory and grandeur.

⁶You’ve let them rule over your handiwork,

putting everything under their feet—

⁷ all sheep and all cattle,

the wild animals too,
8 the birds in the sky,
the fish of the ocean,
everything that travels the pathways of the sea.

God sees us as a marvelous part of the world. And not just humanity in general, but you and I, each of us, is created and called by Jesus, who sees us as the crown of creation. We are worthy, and we belong. When we start to feel like an imposter, fake, or fraud, listen for Jesus to call to us, “You got this. Now come follow me. I’ve got great things in store for you.”