

①

Like many of you, I'm sure, I've read this passage from Luke's gospel many times. I've always understood it to be a story about the truth of God's abundance in the face of apparent scarcity. And that is certainly an important theme in this passage. But when I read the text again last week, I saw something I'd never noticed before.... The text seems to be suggesting that saying "yes" to Jesus is a very risky thing to do.

Simon is doing important work – cleaning his nets after a long night of fishing. It's time-consuming and essential work... and Jesus calls him away from it and asks Simon to paddling him off shore a bit so he can talk to the crowds without getting mobbed. It was convenient for Simon to do this just now, but he has some history with Jesus, who healed his mother-in-law, so agrees to do it.

When Jesus is done teaching, he asks Simon to put back out into the deep waters and let down his nets – those same nets that Simon's buddies have worked all morning to clean. Now Simon knows exactly what it will mean to do this.... It will mean hours more in the boat under the hot sun.... whether or not they catch anything they will have to clean their nets all over again... and it means a lot of backbreaking labour in the heat of the day. But Simon has good reason to trust Jesus and even if they catch only a few fish that's better than going home empty-handed. So out they go.

Whatever Simon was hoping might happen, it wasn't this! They catch a shoal of fish so big that the nets can't are in danger of ripping... which is a big problem for a fisherman – without those nets, Simon has no way of making a living.

So they call to their partners in the other boat who come out and help them bring the fish on board. But there are so many fish that they fill both boats and now the boats are in danger of sinking. What started out as a problem is quickly turning into a perilous catastrophe.

In the midst of this amazing and rather desperate situation, Simon's response to Jesus is interesting... he doesn't ask Jesus to help them get safely to shore; he doesn't glorify or thank Jesus

for the miracle of a catch of fish that will make them rich... he tells Jesus to leave him alone, because he's unworthy.

Somehow, saying "yes" to Jesus has led Simon to a confrontation with his own sense of shame and inadequacy.

That is what spoke to me from this text when I read it, because I totally relate.

A year and a half ago I was invited to participate in an awkward conversation on race in our church - that's what the conference was called An Awkward Conversation on Race.

It was an opportunity for folks in our church to come together for one weekend and focus our attention and conversation on anti-Black racism in the church.

It was hard.

Hard to hear the stories of overt racism directed at Black clergy in our church.... Hard to hear that the very things which make my church a safe and comfortable place for me to worship, create feelings of alienation and unwelcome for many of my black relations - from the style of music, to the language of prayers, to the assumption of a shared cultural experience.... all of which communicate to racialized members of our church that they are "other".

That was quite shattering to learn. But I felt very blessed to have participate in this event.... to have my eyes opened... to discover how much more I still need to learn and understand about White privilege and racism and how they operate in both obvious and subtle ways in our church.

That has become an important priority for me; and while its not easy, I am grateful to have the opportunity and to have gracious and wise colleagues to accompany me in doing this work.

There are times, to be sure, when I feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume and weight of all the stories I hear of pain and betrayal suffered by indigenous and racialized people in our church. It is so much worse than I ever imagined.

I wonder - how can this be the same church I know and love. How can we be so committed to justice and yet perpetrating such injustice?

Some days my gratitude waivers and I am angry and anxious and perplexed.

And then there are other times when the grief I feel is not about what's happened to someone else... it's because I have bumped up against my own racism and I am horrified.

I've heard myself trying to justify my choice to not name a racist dynamic I watched unfolding in a meeting.

I've wondered whether we really have the energy and resources as a church to tackle this issue right now... as if it were optional... as if we could ignore it and still be faithful followers of Jesus.

I have observed my own internal dialogue in which I've argued with myself about why a particular thought or action or assumption of mine isn't actually racist, despite how it may appear.

And in those moments of clarity, when I recognize how my own thoughts and actions are steeped in racism and White privilege, I feel ashamed.

I understand why Simon tells Jesus to leave him... he feels ashamed of his inadequacy.

But Jesus doesn't leave... He says to Simon "don't be afraid, you are more than you know yourself to be".

There is no condemnation in Jesus' words... nor is there any sense of letting Simon off the hook. Jesus simply calls out the best in Simon and allows Simon to see that he can be more.

That is Christ's response to you and me as well, and to our churches as we strive and fall short, and run into our fears and self doubt. Christ invites us to embrace without fear a new identity, a new way of being, a new confidence in what is possible when we are prepared to leave everything behind and follow Jesus.