

You Will Catch People
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Luke 5:1-11

Can you imagine the news headline: This just in, Jesus widens his audience! Jesus is preaching to people on a boat instead of sitting in a Judean synagogue proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Maybe it's because the last two miracles – healing a possessed man and then curing Simon's mother-in-law of a high fever – that the crowd becomes too large. So scenic Lake Gennesaret also known as the Sea of Galilee (13 miles long, 8 miles wide, 680 feet below sea level) becomes a new venue for Jesus.

I remember a decade ago staying in a kibbutz there watching the sun go down and stepping on a boat the next morning with my fellow pilgrims. Unforgettable how quiet, peaceful and beautiful it is on the Sea of Galilee. It is what Celtic spirituality would label a thin place or a holy space. Up until now, Jesus acts alone but He chooses to share this Kingdom work with others and with you and me.

Why fishermen? In the Old Testament fishing metaphor often refers to gathering people for judgment:

Amos 4:2

The sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks."

Jeremiah 16:16

"But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks."

God always calls the remnant in the Old Testament to repentance and then forgives them. The theology of the cross in the New Testament is God's redemptive act in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection that will transform us into his disciples. Some may be thinking there is cheap grace without repentance. But it won't be an easy path. How radically will you or I follow Jesus and love our neighbor?

Let's pray:

We give you permission Lord to completely disrupt our lives in concert with your greater purposes. We pray that you will give us courage to be fully available to you. Teach us what we need to know, tell us where we need to go, and show us with whom we may join in this journey. We can catch men and women alive – to live the Good News in all its fullness. How can we rescue people from death and allow them to live in freedom? How can we make Jesus real for

others? Most people give up too soon. Help us to stand firm and try, try again. (Mac Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 26)

God is aware of suffering, especially man's inhumanity to man. People can love only whom they know. About 28 percent of the people who live around us do not speak English at home. Have we met them? Jesus became one of us, so he knows us. Where can we find Jesus today? He's among the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger. Fish and loaves sustain an exiled community. Sometimes obedience to God gives us courage to move beyond our own human strength to change the way we live and be among the suffering.

On Tuesday evening, I attended the screening of a new documentary *Back Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story* at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. I had read his book *Jesus and the Disinherited* as part of my training to be a spiritual director in 2012. Thurman was moral anchor for the Civil Rights Movement. In the 1930s, he was the dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University. Filmmaker Martin Doblmeier said he hopes the film will renew, refresh, recommit people in today's struggle for justice. Thurman practiced contemplative spirituality and spoke about a survival of values to respond to injustice. Thurman was a sage – whose message appears as one of resistance from an inner sanctuary. He said one can learn to love from solitude and silence. Thurman supported intercultural and open boundaries to offer conditions to experience unity. Possibly all of these could be tools to heal our own current polarized chaos. I came home that evening to watch the State of the Union address and the Democratic response by Stacey Abrams; I am wondering about what will happen next week.

The United Nations says 38 million are fishermen or fish farmers in developing countries. About 500 million more receive indirect employment from the fishing industry. During the first century more fish were eaten than any other meat. The Sea of Galilee provides a fishing industry of fresh fish, salted fish, dried fish or pickled fish for export. This was quite the miracle of the catching two boatloads of panfish in a trammel net (composed of 3 nets – inner net to trap fish) not sardines or catfish (Jews not allowed to eat). It was yet another sign pointing to how the Messiah **Jesus** dwells in their midst.

One time, an Ethiopian Muslim man asked me why the disciples of John the Baptist asks Jesus if he is the One, or if they should expect another. So, I asked the Muslim man, how Jesus responds – the lame walk and the blind see!!!

The Greek word for disciple is *Mathetes* (math-ay-tes) student who is teachable, who responds to the call of Jesus. There is an urgency, a reversal of priorities and reordering of commitment from livelihood and financial gain to being a public witness of Jesus' love for all people. So too for you and me in hearing today's Word, deliberating is not enough but requires each of us to leave the Old Way and follow the New Way. Karl Barth says, "*Limited readiness is no readiness at all in our dealings with Jesus.*" It must be instant obedience where we renounce our attachment to possessions.

Let's take another look at the dialogue:

Jesus: Put out into the deep water and let down your nets to catch some fish.

Simon: Teacher, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will lower the nets.

Simon: Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!

Jesus: Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people instead of fish.

Peter's name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter and no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. No disciple is so frequently rebuked by the Lord as Peter; and no disciple ever rebukes the Lord except Peter. No one else confesses Christ more boldly or acknowledges His lordship more explicitly; yet no other disciple ever verbally denies Christ as forcefully or as publicly as Peter; yet Peter was the only one Christ ever addresses as Satan. All of that contributes to making him the leader Christ wants him to be (*Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur, 39.) The Lord is constantly teaching Peter restraint and love.

Peter submits to Jesus' request in Luke 5 as an act of obedience in humble acknowledgement of the one asking. This obedience leads to miraculous results. Peter recognizes the presence and power of God in Jesus. In this encounter, James and John also leave family, friends and physical possessions.

What is the fastest growing religion, today? It's atheism – atheists meet on Sunday and worship the idols of discovery, modernity, advancement of civilization replaces the need for God. I once sat at the National Press Club listening to Richard Dawkins. He was trying to convince a young standing room only crowd that humanity had advanced exponentially in the last generation. Apparently, Dawkins had not seen the front page of any morning newspaper. I think most atheists have not grieved a major loss in their lives and are angry with God. Dawkins is one of these people.

So, as we leave to catch people for Jesus this week, these words from St. Paul (Romans 12:2):

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Amen.

Let's go fishing!