

5Epiphany, Luke 5:1-11  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
February 9, 2025

We will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods we will sing your praise. Amen.

Many of you know that my husband is my sermon editor. He has a gift of being able to spot arcane scholarly expressions that most people cannot make any sense of. They make sense only to people who have spent a good deal of time immersed in theology or bible textbooks and lectures. On occasion some of those expressions or phrases show up in a draft for my sermon. My husband Charles has a way of breaking it to me gently that I need to start over. The bad news for you all is that he is away this weekend, gone to visit his cousin. I apologize if, in the end, this sermon makes no sense to you. If you have any complaints, his email address is [cebqsr@gmail.com](mailto:cebqsr@gmail.com).

One of the reasons I married Charles was that he is adventurous. When we were first married and living in southern California we went deep sea fishing just off of Catalina Island, just off the coast of LA. It was an absolutely beautiful day and I love going out on a boat so it was not hard to convince me to go. I had never fished before so I was just going along for the ride. Being a good sport, though, I joined in and gave fishing a try. To my surprise, every time I dropped my line I caught a fish. I remember they were beautiful good sized red snappers. I could not believe it. Neither could my husband and our friend. They never caught a thing.

The gospel text this morning is about fish and fishing so I couldn't help but think of that time when I went fishing. I couldn't help but think about how dejected Charles and our friend were that they hadn't caught anything, and they were just fishing for pleasure. The fishermen in Luke's gospel text were fishing for their very livelihood and

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after a full night of fishing, hours and hours of hard work fishing, they had caught nothing. I could only imagine the depth of their frustration.

They had just come into shore and were mending their nets. Jesus happened to be standing on the shore at that same time surrounded, as usual, by crowds wanting to see him and hear from him. Without stopping, He made his way through the crowds over to the fishermen and got into one of their boats. It was Simon's boat. Simon had not invited him on board but when Jesus stepped on he did not stand in Jesus' way. He did not resist Jesus, even though he must have been dog tired. When Jesus asked him to take him a little way out into the water so he could teach from there, I imagine Simon thought that was not too much to ask so he obliged and sailed Jesus out a short way off of the shore..

Jesus did teach from there but then he made another request of Simon. He said, "Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon again obliged, likely begrudgingly, because he must have thought, "Oh right, a preacher who is also a carpenter thinks he knows better than I do how to fish." The rest of the story is what most of us remember about it. Suddenly, the nets were overflowing with fish. They were catching so many fish that they had to call out the other boats to help haul it all in. There were so many fish their nets were bursting.

Bursting. That word kind of reminds me of the story about putting new wine into old wineskins. Jesus, who is the new wine, was so radically fresh his presence would cause the old wineskins to burst. Here, were the fish being filled by Jesus' divine presence bursting the old nets? Maybe.

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Simon was about to burst himself. When the overwhelming abundance of fish appeared, he knew this was no coincidence, he knew that the abundance was brought about by Jesus' divine presence with them. Jesus had started off by establishing his authority by teaching from Simon's boat. Simon and all the fishermen would have heard that teaching along with the crowds lining the shore. No doubt that increased Simon's admiration and appreciation for Jesus. Simon and the rest of them still were not clear about who he truly was.

But at the moment that Simon realized that he was in the presence of true divinity he fell to his knees, like Moses when he encountered the burning bush, or Jacob when he wrestled with the angel at the river Jabbok, or Isaiah when he saw the hem of the Lord's garment fill the temple. When they compared themselves in their own mind's eye to the awesomeness that was in their presence, they saw all of their flaws and weaknesses in stark relief. It would be like seeing an image of yourself in a magnifying mirror where every scar and blemish appears in exaggerated proportion. Who can stand next to that kind of perfection?

Well, we know from all of these stories from scripture that we all can. But first we must acknowledge that we are sinners, have strayed from God's ways like lost sheep, and seek forgiveness. When we confess and repent, God forgives. We know that God wants to use everything and everyone He created for His purposes. When we repent and are reconciled and forgiven God can use us as vessels of His love and justice and mercy. God uses the gifts and skills of the righteous and the forgiven to work his will in this world. God can even use the unrighteous and unforgiven but they don't feel the joy

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and abundance that can bring to someone's life. God forgave Moses for his doubts in God and in himself and then used Moses' newfound faith and righteousness to gather up the Hebrews. Moses bravely led them out from slavery in Egypt. God forgave Jacob at the Jabbok. He used Jacob's ambition and persistence to establish the twelve tribes of Israel.

When Isaiah realized he was in the presence of the divine he was terrified that he would die. He thought no one could see the divine and live. So when the seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with a hot coal and relieved his sin and guilt, he was emboldened. God said to him, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me!" You see, God used Isaiah's gifts of faith, righteousness and perception to prophesy, to challenge, guide and comfort God's people.

Likewise, Luke tells us that when Simon realized that he was in the company of the divine he was afraid. He screamed out for Jesus to get away from him, because he was a sinful man. But Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, Simon." Jesus knew that Simon had perceived that he was in the presence of God somehow even though he could not yet understand how or why. Jesus had seen something in Simon and wanted him to use the same persistence and endurance that he had developed as a fisherman to follow him on his ministry journey. Jesus wanted Simon to use his awareness of Jesus' connection to the power of the divine to persuade people to have faith in Jesus, too. Simon, James and John, all fishermen, turned from what they knew, and went from being people who caught fish for a living to being disciples who lived to catch people.

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Are we in the presence of the divine right now? I think the chances are very good that God is here with us. Chances are that God is patiently waiting for us even now to sense His presence in our lives and be awed by it. I can't think of a time when I didn't sense that God was near but it took me a long time to sense how near He really is to us. Maybe my catching fish after fish that day forty some years ago was a sign of His nearness. I wasn't ready to hear Him calling me. When I began to hear that call, I resisted, like Isaiah and Simon, I couldn't imagine that I was worthy to be called. But now I know, like Simon came to know, that all people are called to receive God's grace. Whether we choose to receive it or not is up to us. I was afraid at first to let go and trust that God would or could lead me. I'm here to tell you God will and God can lead us. One foot after the other I strive to follow Jesus and let the Holy Spirit shine the light on the path ahead. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." I am praying that you will join hands with me and follow Christ on that stairway to heaven, too.