

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

CHRIST WITH US AT THE LAKESHORE

Luke 5:1-11

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

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 signalled to 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Getting Out

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *“Washing Their Nets”*

The fishermen (Simon, James, John, others?) are going about their daily business, but are not particularly inspired. They have “gone out of” the boats and are washing their nets; but it is more than simply boats that they have left behind (v. 2). They had lost all zeal in their daily activity. Disgruntled. Frustrated. Just getting by. This may sound familiar to more than those in the fishing business.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *“We Have Caught Nothing”*

Despair is just beneath the surface. All it takes is one suggestion by Jesus to try some more fishing to elicit the resigned response: “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.” That’s giving up. Quitting. Of course, Simon does the perfunctory task—more out of obligation than faith. (Still, see how Jesus will parlay even this for good news!)

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *“A Sinful Person”*

Much to Simon’s surprise (as well as the surprise of his “partners”) is the overwhelming catch. So many fish to the point of breaking the nets (that earlier were to be washed out), and this brings Simon to his knees; he recognizes that the One who stands before him comes as the breaking presence of God. This One, Simon realizes, is One before whom he has no business standing. If God comes breaking through—even with daily graces—in our despairing unfaith, we too are driven to our knees in recognition of our sore lack of faith in the midst of so much

divine fullness. This is more than we can take, and the truth of the “deep water” (v. 4) we are in is quite evident: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful person!”

PROGNOSIS: Getting On Board

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus “Got into the Boat” ... with Us*

What makes the presence of God palatable for us is the One who actually is with us in the boat—Jesus the Christ. “Do not be afraid!” he says to us, with the authority of God. The chutzpa he demonstrates in offering such calm advice is matched by a similar chutzpa to occupy our boats in the first place (v. 3). Jesus has made himself part of our sinking ships (v. 7) in his death and resurrection, in order to see us beyond the depths of our sinfulness into the fullness of his life and grace.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *“Amazed” by Faith*

While amazing events in our lives (for Simon, the catch of fish) may indeed reveal our sinfulness to us, far better is that they point us to the One who has caught us in his net: Jesus the Christ. At Jesus’ feet in the boat, even at his feet beneath the cross, we have the abundance of God’s grace for our lives—enough to cover not only our day’s need, but all our days’ needs. And it is not judgment but favor we come to enjoy. He got into our boat for a saving reason—everything we need is here in his presence!

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *“You Will Be Catching People”*

New inspiration takes hold as transformed fisherfolk come to the shore this time. A new challenge, filled with hope and promise, is now given: “from now on, you will be catching people!” And for these people we employ the nets of grace that comes in the washing of baptism. Christ’s daily business is now our daily

business; we follow him, seeking to be in the boats (even sinking ones) of others, to share his joy and hope. [One possible note for grace-living this February: Consider how many may be netted with grace in the Souper-Bowl of Caring this year! Visit www.souperbowl.org .]