

# **Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

## **NET-WORKING IN CHRIST**

**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 signaled 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.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Exhausted in Our Net-work

### **Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *All our Best Efforts*

It isn't that Simon and his companions are not trying. God knows they are trying. They are trying so hard that they are exhausted from their labors. But like so many (even today), even their best efforts, their "professional" work, is leaving them without a catch. And for the life of them, they can't figure out why, even as they hold on to the nets they are washing in their hands.

### **Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Coming up Empty*

It gets exposed, this "professional" exterior, when "amateur" fisherman, Jesus, comes along and says, "put out into deep water and let down your nets." Here Simon bristles, maybe even rolls his eyes, as he drops his guard just a bit. "Master, we have worked all night long and caught nothing." There is no recognition, let alone confession, of the stoic-stubbornness that maybe we don't have all the answers. Yet the truth remains, there is "nothing" in what we are doing. And that "nothing" is not only on the surface of things, but deep in the spirit.

### **Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Netted in Slavery to Sin*

It is the remarkable success of what the "amateur" Jesus has recommended that leads "professional" Peter to sink to his knees, even as the boats themselves are sinking. Knee deep in fish, Peter is finding his face not only buried in all of this that he calls his life's work, but realizing that the God he "ought" to be thanking and praising, serving and obeying, is not only standing before him but in his boat. And that makes him,

understandably, fearful. His “nets,” which are a symbol of his own life, cannot hold it all.

## **PROGNOSIS: Net-worked by Christ for Excitement**

### **Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Breaking the Nets***

Yet Jesus says to those who are so terrified, “Do not be afraid.” Jesus has come to not only break the chains of fear, but to break the chains of the very nets that have us enslaved. Burgeoning with grace, his episode here is a foretaste of what he will do on the cross. All our netted, legalistic existence with God will be shorn and made public in his body; but also there comes in Jesus a new network of extended arms that embrace and cross our lives. All of this was spoken as Jesus was in the boat with Simon (as he is in our boat, the church). The nets are breaking, because the kingdom of God is breaking in with hope and promise.

### **Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Leading Us to Confession***

Confession of Jesus as “Lord,” penitentially to be sure, but also with joy and exclamation, is the refilling of our emptiness. Pinning our hopes on him, and letting go of our old nets as any kind of ultimate “safety nets”—a strain that they cannot bear as this gospel makes clear—we have everything we need. Here in Jesus our Lord is our ultimate hope! He will be with us in the deep water and on the shore, in all of life and in all of death.

### **Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Following Him***

And so we follow him. We are no longer the “professionals” who boast in the darkness, “I know what I am doing,” but the ones who profess Christ in the darkness—and over the darkness—for those netted in that darkness, holding on to their nets. Our outstretched arms and hands, reaching to them, like Christ’s on

the cross, invite one and all to join this new net-work. There is no greater joy!