



First Congregational United Church of Christ

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Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

February 6, 2022

We are delighted that you joined us today! We hope you will find us an affirming, uplifting, and committed family of faith. Here we work to make everyone, without any exceptions, to feel accepted, inspired, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. In dialogue, we seek to understand. In encouragement, we seek to heal. In all things we yearn to live by love, for peace, with joy. This is a place where your intellect will be challenged, your heart will be nurtured, and your spirit refreshed. Varying beliefs are expressed openly and freely, and your doubts will not be suppressed. We trust that we are all, every person and part of creation, continuing to be blessed by God's grace; and that in community we can help each other to see this grace alive in our lives and relationships. We hope to share our gifts with you, even as we pray that you will want to share your gifts with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to be a part of our lives and our spiritual home. Welcome!

POINTS TO PONDER

“^{5.1}Once 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.”— *Luke 5.1-3*

“Chapter 5 is not far in Luke's gospel in telling the story of Jesus. We've heard about his birth and the prophecies concerning him and his cousin, John. We have heard about an incident at age 12 when he was teaching in the temple. We've heard of Jesus' baptism by John, and then when he went through a period of temptation in the wilderness. And he has just begun his teaching ministry in Galilee, his home region. In his own town, we saw that he was rejected, and almost killed there we're told; though he had started to receive acclaim elsewhere. Then he goes to Capernaum, where he teaches in the synagogue with authority. There he heals a man with an unclean spirit and, later at Simon's house, heals Simon's mother-in-law who had a fever and many other people with various ailments. He is attracting a following with his wise words and healing

deeds, and now is the time to start considering who will follow and who will not. This story begins the process of Jesus calling his disciples.

Why do you think he went to a fishing village to call his disciples? What were the people finding so fascinating in his words, or were they only attracted by his healings?

When the crowd presses in on him, he reclaims his personal boundaries by getting in Simon's boat and speaking to the people from there just off the shoreline. How does this physical distancing foreshadow the spiritual distancing that will in time ensue? What do the activities of Simon and the other fishermen having 'gone out of their boats' and 'washing their nets' refer to beyond the literal acts of doing these things? Are they no longer feeling connected to their source of livelihood (i.e., their boats) in a world in which gives them little back for their efforts? Are they 'washing their nets' as merely a way to keep them from getting crusty, or does it indicate a type of baptism they are having in being introduced to Jesus' presence...a cleansing of their souls to prepare to follow the one who will teach them about God's better way of life than one that is controlled by rulers and empire?

Does his preaching from a boat indicate the instability of his early ministry in being able to attract faithful followers? It is said that Jesus sat down in the boat to teach them, indicating it may have been wavy as he did so; but also perhaps that he did not consider himself above them, but on their same level. What does preaching from a lake that was the productive center of the village say about how Jesus' message would influence their lives?" — *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

"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.'" — *Luke 5.4-5*

"Jesus has already been impressive with his words and with his healing of people. But now we have an episode where he also seems to have the power of the cosmos on his side, being able to direct fish into the nets of fishermen who had spent the entire night fishing to no avail. This is an ancient story-teller's way of indicating that the teachings and activities of this man are to be listened to and followed, as he must have the power of the gods or God on his side.

Jesus' few words here are highly mytho-poetic. 'Put out into the deep water' is not merely an instruction to take the boat further offshore, but also suggests that these interested followers delve deeper in their understanding of reality. 'The deep' was always regarded as a place of mystery. Humans could not swim into that realm without considerable risk. Jesus is taking them to a place that will be above their heads, and they will have to learn to swim, or walk, with him in order to flourish in this deeper place of our meaning and purpose in human living.

'Let down your nets for a catch' is sufficiently vague enough for us to wonder what is actually to be caught. Is it only fish? Or is it greater understanding, greater perception, greater commitment, greater faithfulness, and greater connection to God and God's world?

If they are willing to take this risk, they are told they will get a catch. And here we must not assume it is a catch of fish so much as it is a catch of wisdom, of purpose, of meaning, and of fulfillment. Jesus has a vision, and to those who will follow it, wonderful things are to come.

Simon, a prototypical human, is not convinced by such promises initially. However, we assume that he no longer feels he has much to lose by following Jesus' lead. He may be tired and cranky after having fished all night without success, but if one more attempt makes a difference, he is willing to try it. How does his state of being reflect our own throughout our lives? When have we been willing to try something we doubted would work? When have we trusted in that which pulled at our imaginations even though it contradicted our

reasonings and experience? What does Simon’s willingness to take instruction tell us about our own need to keep learning from life?”— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

“⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.”— *Luke 5.6-7*

“The catch is beyond imagination. There are so many fish in the nets that the nets are not strong enough to hold all of the fish. Seeing it is above their own means to contend with this huge catch, they ask others to come and help. This is symbolic of the need for more than just a group of Jesus and 12 disciples to do the ministry that will transform the world. We can’t do it alone. We need the help of many others. The task is great – greater than our abilities...greater than our strength and the strength of the things we have previously used to keep us going.

Even with the two boats available, the boats were over-filled and nearly sinking. Is this not a metaphor for us that in following Jesus’ lead, we will be led into waters where we ourselves will be at risk of drowning? Is it not an indicator that as blessed as we will be in following Jesus’ lead, and the abundant goodness that is caught in doing so, that the very blessing we partake may also be the reason for our sinking? There are perils to following the right path in an unjust world.

Jesus will have them to leave their boats and their nets behind in order to follow him. They will have to give up all the things that kept them afloat in a world that had them perpetually treading water. Are we ready to take such risks for the following of God’s ways?”— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

“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.”— *Luke 5.8-10b*

“Have you ever felt like you didn’t deserve all the blessing that came your way at a particular time? Simon Peter has experienced Jesus’ words in the synagogue, the healing Jesus did of his mother-in-law and others who came to his house, and now this feat of helping them catch two boatloads of fish when earlier they couldn’t catch anything. It is part of the human condition for many to not be quick to think well of a person until the person has ‘proven him/herself’ to us in ways that few people can ever live up to. Simon likely feels guilt of why it took so long for him to be convinced of the goodness of Jesus.

In peering into his own human nature, Simon doesn’t see someone who is worthy of Jesus’ presence and blessing in his life. He is impressed by all that Jesus have proven to be, but perhaps so much so that he feels his own inferiority in Jesus’ presence. Who among us hasn’t been there when in the presence of those we most revere?

Yet, Jesus does not revolt at Simon’s self-perceived sinfulness. Jesus looks at the heart of a person, not all their imperfections. Indeed, Jesus avoids explicitly confirming or denying Simon’s own view of himself, and will tell him not to be afraid; welcoming Simon and his two fishing partners into his inner sanctum of discipleship.

The catch of fish might have been amazing for Simon, James, and John, but the greater catch was their catching of the Spirit of Jesus which helped them to see that he was for real. He was an authentic person who practiced what he preached, and who was also blessed by abilities of healings and miracles that seemed to be divinely bestowed. They have the distinct inkling that they may have met up with the Messiah who would liberate the people; bringing about an eternal reign of justice, peace, and love worldwide.

Simon calls Jesus ‘Lord,’ which, though a common expression of reverence for regular people in that day, may have been more descriptive of Simon’s new perception of Jesus as the possible Messiah that they have all long-awaited. We will see that Simon wrestles throughout Jesus’ ministry as to Jesus’ real identity, but the hope that he is who he imagines him to be is enough to help Simon to buy into the vision that Jesus is teaching and evidencing.

Jesus will call all three of these fishermen to be his disciples. And they had to wonder how such people as themselves, so low on the social totem pole, would be worthy of such a high calling – to be the cohorts of the Messiah. And yet, we see in the entire Biblical record that God often calls those who are not high ranking, and who may have even been misfits. We may wonder ourselves what God could possibly do with us given our recognition of our own limitations, but God never seems to mind what failures and foibles we have so long as we are intent on changing our ways and following God’s own virtues and values as we respond to the call.

Does our amazement ever get in the way of living up to our higher calling? Do we sometimes push away the call to be a part of God’s plan when we don’t see ourselves as worthy of being a part of that plan? What would it take for us to respond to a calling by God that we are not sure we are worthy to undertake? Is Simon’s example of simply moving forward and following the call of God an inspiration to us to trust even when we are unsure of ourselves?” – *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

“We fear that we are inadequate, but our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves: ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be these things? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people around you won’t feel insecure. We are all meant to shine as children do. We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically releases others.”

– *Marianne Williamson, from 'A Return to Love'*

“Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’”

– *Luke 5.10c-e*

“Fear is what stops us most often in being our best selves. Jesus calls these three fishermen as his first disciples in Luke’s gospel, and he sees a willingness in them to try doing what their own experience and reason tells them is impossible. They don’t foresee that catching all of those fish was really going to happen after their years of experience and recent bad luck the night before told them otherwise.

However, they are willing to try anyway. Maybe they thought they’d finally prove to Jesus that his suggestion was ridiculous, and that he might listen to their own experience about fishing in the future. Whatever the case, they were surprised to the point of fright in seeing this ‘miracle’ of fish caught in their nets that previously were empty.

Jesus recognizes their fears, and we see him saying here at the beginning of his ministry what will become a constant refrain throughout the course of it: ‘Do not be afraid.’ Fear, Jesus understands, is the saboteur of love. Fear undermines our enthusiasm, inspiration, and joy in loving others and doing what we can to love the world and try to make it a better place.

This mythic story of Jesus’ call of his first disciples serves to remind us that when we don’t let fear dictate our lives, we open the gates of blessing to come pouring out in our lives. Whether it is fish, or a sense of self-respect, or the joy that comes from generosity in helping others, we find overwhelming blessing in our lives when fear is cast aside and we answer the call from God to be more than we thought we could be.

Jesus tells his newfound disciples that their days of fishing for fish are at an end. From now on, they are to fish for people – a metaphor for these disciples to start hooking onto the people’s hearts, imaginations, and souls to get them to follow in the ways that God leads us; into a mysterious, but bountiful, future. It is a mesmerizing possibility.

Jesus has spoken to groups of people, but he has seen in these three the audacity and courage to attempt what they haven’t ever experienced. And that is likely the quality he was most looking for in his disciples. Jesus didn’t need the wisest, the most morally pure, the most skilled, the wealthiest, or the best in any category where humans judge each other as successes in life. He needed people who were willing to look beyond their preconceptions of what was possible, and join him in creating a better world – catching the hearts and souls of people so that they, too, would come to see the possibilities of making God’s long-standing plan real in our lives.

Are we listening? Are we excited? Are we willing to go forth?”

– *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

“¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

– *Luke 5.11*

“The transformation of these three fishermen’s hearts is revealed in this short sentence. They had made their living on fishing in these very boats, and now they were leaving their boats for others to use while they decided to engage in more important matters of changing the societal structures which they understood that the Messiah would do.

The phrase ‘they left everything and followed him’ includes not only their boats and careers, but also their homes and families. We aren’t told here whether they have wives, children, or other family members in which they are responsible for. But who cannot imagine these things as likelihoods?

They are awestruck by these last couple of days with Jesus, and they want to be a part of this pivotal shift in history away from human empire and towards the community of God – a shift that will, in their eyes, bless their family and loved ones far more than anything they could do as mere fishermen who are eking by a living in a village on the shores of this inland lake.

They are willing to journey with Jesus, spread the good news, and help others like themselves to catch hold of this sacred Spirit that they see exists within Jesus. They anticipate that the Messianic age is upon them, and they want to be part of this monumental change in human civilization. They now have a cause and purpose in their lives that is far above what they could previously have imagined. Jesus has inspired them with his own Spirit, and they want to experience that Spirit for themselves – not simply for their own gain, but for the gain of all humanity and the whole world.

Are we willing to follow such incredible dreams? Have we limited our vision of what is possible in our lives through the inspiration and power of the Spirit of God? What would be important enough for us to leave all we have ever known and journey towards a purpose in which we see the possibility of changes in the structures of society itself? Do our fears keep us from imagining and following such a calling? How do we answer Jesus’ call when he tells us not to fear?” – *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/31/2021*

CALLED TOGETHER AS SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Seth Chronister

Affirming God's Presence in Us All

Welcoming the Light of Love in Our Midst

Seth Chronister

We prepare ourselves for communing with the sacred as love's light is brought into our awareness. The light of love burns within and among each of us, and we carry that light into our sanctuary; visually reminding us of the image of the divine that lives in our hearts, minds, and souls – and that we nourish through our faith-filled fellowship.

***Centering Our Souls**

"Catching the Spirit" Inspired by Luke 5.1-11

Seth Chronister

You who calls us from the busy-ness of our lives, from the jobs we do, from the careers we plan, and from the family and friends with whom we love:

Speak to us from the lake that laps us with love, from the boat that is buoyed by benevolence.

While we are preoccupied with washing and mending the nets of our nostalgia, you ask us to listen to words that will inspire us to live more passionately into our future.

Teach us on the level that we can understand, but also so that we will be encouraged and empowered.

You tell us to put our vessels out into the deep water, but we grow wary of the waves and we dread the depth in which you ask us to go.

You ask us to prepare ourselves for a catch, but we too often respond that we neither have the time or the ambition to try what we have failed at doing previously.

Speak to our spirits that we may listen to your proddings, and like Simon, follow your guidance when we have grown tired and weary.

Surprise us with the catch of our lives! Open our eyes to see the world that you have planned for us; and not the one we know has always been, and fear will always be.

Remind us to signal our partners for help when the task is too great for us to complete by ourselves. When our nets are breaking, teach us the patience to wait until more help arrives.

When our boats are overflowing with the fish of fortune, make us mindful of the need to share our catch with others and to bless those most in need.

When we are burdened with the abundance of blessings, teach us not to turn away from your path in thinking that we are not worthy of the task to which you have called us.

Teach us not to be afraid; neither of our possible failures, nor of our potential successes. You have called us not to be cowards of 'can't' but wizards of 'will.'

Entice us to leave behind the things that do not fulfill our lives, and grasp hold of that which gives us meaning and purpose.

When we are content to simply believe, prod instead to actually follow. May we fish for the hearts, minds, and souls of your people and creation – near and far, now and always.

WE LISTEN FOR THE SACRED IN THE MIDST OF OUR LIVES

***Hymn of Discipleship**

"Jesus Calls Us, o'er the Tumult"

#172

A Time for All God's Children

Abbie Chronister

Prayers

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns, and Acts of Compassion or Kindness

Silent Meditation: The Prayers of the People

Pastoral Prayer

Unison Prayer: "Poetic Prayer in the Spirit of Christ"

Seth Chronister

Loving Spirit, who is here and there,
we're grateful for your tender care.
Your virtues rise, your values prized;
near and far, and everywhere.
Feed our bodies, and feed our souls.
And by forgiveness make us whole.
And may we all evils deplore,
as we search and sail for mercy's shore.
May peace and love within us rule,
and justice be your Spirit's tool;
Now and always, for us and others,
and for all creation.
May we make it so, all as one,
by your inspiration.

Scripture Lessons

Luke 5:1-11

Seth Chronister

^{5.1}Once 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 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.

Message

"What Jesus Wants Us to Catch"

***Hymn of Calling**

"You Have Come down to the Lakeshore"

#173

WE AFFIRM & CELEBRATE OUR UNITY AS GOD'S CREATION

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

(As God calls all people to the table of forgiveness, peace, and loving fellowship, First Congregational UCC affirms an inclusive and open Communion Table. All persons (all ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations/identities, disabilities, religious affiliations, and other distinguishing features) are welcome to partake of this sacrament which affirms that we are all part of God's family and are to commune together in sacred relationship. Love and peace are the uniting virtues of this spiritual meeting place. Therefore, all who wish to join in this ritual of unity are invited to do so providing that you do so in the spirit of peace and mutual love for one another.)

The Purpose of Holy Communion Seth Chronister (bold print) & Rev. Bret Myers (reg. print)

God seeks to be in communion with us, and wills that we be in communion with one another. Through the Christ in Jesus, God drew closer to us by living among us with all the desires and temptations of being human,

and showed us that we each have the power to overcome wrongdoing by the inspiration of our spiritual lives and the discipline of our physical lives; thereby effecting the Christ in us. Jesus represented the individual model of how we each can do this; and in calling to his side the disciples and followers in his way of love and peace, many of whom were ostracized by the wider society, he revealed how to model this in our community here on Earth.

Reminding us symbolically of this union of body and spirit, Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it like we are often broken in our relationships with one another, and showed us the way to reconciliation by asking us to share our bread with one another in remembrance of his own example. Through the broken bread, we participate in and become the body of Christ in the world.

In like manner, Jesus took the cup filled with the fruit of the vine, the vine that sustains us and links us to one another, and the fruit that nourishes the spirit of virtue that abides within and between each of us, and asked us to drink of that same spirit of loving-kindness and uniting harmony that was in him. Through the cup of blessing, we participate in and become the new life of Christ in the world.

The bread and fruit we partake nourishes us that we may nourish others. Through this sacrament of Holy Communion, we affirm that we are committed to Christ's way of love and peace by our motives, thoughts, actions, and practices in this world. We acknowledge that we are one community made by God, and that we must consciously choose, day by day, to be in right relationship with God, each other, and our sacred values. We therefore dedicate ourselves, individually and collectively, to make the Body and Spirit of Christ real in this world, here and now, and throughout our life as a community of the faithful. What we symbolize here in this holy space, we make real by our service when we go forth from this place.

Invitation

Christ invites "all" to the table of reconciliation – those who affirm their intrinsic worth, and those who are yet to do so...those whose hearts and minds are admirable, and those still struggling to make them so...those who are most like us, and those who are least like us. In the spirit of Christ, we at First Congregational United Church of Christ welcome you to share your spiritual journey with us as we share ours with you in a sacrament designed to bridge all differences in a spirit of extravagant welcome, of heartfelt openness, and of mutual loving-kindness. In coming together, let us recognize our responsibility in living in love and peace with one another and all creation so as to be joined together as one Holy Communion of Body and Spirit throughout this good earth.

Partaking of the Bread and Juice

(You are invited to use bread and juice in your own home as we share the elements virtually)

Commissioning

Go forth with forgiveness, courage, faith, hope, love, peace, justice, kindness, and gentleness. May these virtues, representing the image of God in each one of us as was also manifested in Jesus, strengthen you to reach out in compassion as you nurture and aid others within this worldwide community. May the Spirit and grace of God be with you and among you. Blessings be.

WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TO GOD'S SERVICE THROUGH FAITHFULNESS

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

We invite you to place your offering in the containers as you leave, or you may give online or by mail. Thank you!

"Generosity arises from gratitude like heat arises from fire. Like fire, gratitude is lovely to see;

but when it warms others with generosity, that is when it becomes a true blessing."

Special Music

***Unison Prayer of Dedication**

Seth Chronister

We are called to be a generous people, always building up the Body of Christ. Let us not forget our calling, but to humbly, patiently, and gently live it day by day. Let us help bear with love the burdens of the weak, the poor, and the oppressed – coming to their aid in word, in action, and by sharing what we have with them. Let us all make every effort to build unity between ourselves and our siblings throughout the world, letting your Spirit lead and strengthen us so that we may create the bond of peace with justice that makes us all one. Let these gifts we offer today aid this calling we have from you, and so also aid those most in need. May it be so.

***Encouragement for the Journey**

Jesus called his disciples to go to the deep waters where we'd catch his same Spirit.
He asked us to say 'yes' to God and to a better world
by saying 'no' to poverty, injustice, discrimination, oppression, and all other forms of evil.
Jesus had a fire in his belly and heart, and even in his bones,
to let down the net of peace, justice, and compassion;
and he asks us to kindle that same fire within ourselves.
We are the fishers of people, who catch them in their need, and release them into blessing.
Go forth to liberate the oppressed, to rescue the weak, to free the imprisoned,
to deliver the sick, to help the poor, and to save all who are 'the least of these.'
This is our calling from Christ. This is our discipleship as followers of Christ.
Take this fire with you wherever you may go.

Postlude

Get In Touch with Us!

Questions?

**Call 319-234-8927 or email us at
fcuccoffice@gmail.com**

(Messages will be checked periodically)

Pastor Bret Myers: revbmyers@yahoo.com

Youth Director Abbie: abbie.youthdirector@gmail.com

Music Director Luke: firstconguccmusic@gmail.com

Organist Hudson: HUDSON.LOURENCO7@gmail.com

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Custodian Kyle: fcuccbuilding@gmail.com

Please make an appointment with Rev. Myers if you would like to meet with the pastor.

You may email him at revbmyers@yahoo.com, or call/text his cell at 608-370-9472.

Video talking is also available via Skype or Zoom.

Nourishment for the Journey

Scripture Lesson Luke 5.1-11

^{5.1}Once 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 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.

Too often we read Biblical stories as historical happenings and consequently do not see the deeper meaning behind them. The mythology behind the words is most often more important than the literal words themselves. For instance, the lake of Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Chinnereth, was a large inland lake that provided food for whole communities of people in Jesus' time, as well as before and after him. That Jesus was standing and preaching at this location serves to suggest to the reader that his words were as sustaining to their souls as the fish in the lake were for their bodies.

Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, at a time in which he was fishing for disciples, he went to an area where people knew how to live off of the land and the water – who appreciated how to work together for a common cause as a community, who knew the value of caring for others and coming to each other's aid, and who understood that what is yours and what is mine is less important than that we share what we have to give with one another.

Jesus, himself growing up with these values, comes to preach to people with those same values. They are ready for hearing that message, for they have been bombarded with messages from those in the cities, and the rulers of the land, that speak to them of another set of values that serve the rich and powerful rather than the common person.

Jesus gathers a crowd, large enough that they are impinging on his personal space. And so he gets in a boat, a vessel they are very familiar with as the vehicle of their livelihoods, and speaks to them of truths which will edify their lives. We are not yet told the substance of his message, though there have been clues about it in the four earlier chapters.

The boat he preaches from is Simon's – later to be known as Peter. In the previous chapter, Jesus had taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, the worship place of the local people, and had attracted Simon's interest such that Simon asked him to come to his house. There he healed Simon's mother-in-law from a fever, and she in gratitude began to serve them. Jesus healed others there in Simon's house – the place where he called home. Now, he is by the lake, which is the workplace of Simon and many others. Jesus therefore is portrayed as one who influences one's life in one's worship place, one's home, and one's work life. His message is seen to be so meaningful that it pervades every part of one's existence. This is the meaning behind the words, and it becomes a part of the mythology about who Jesus was – the Messiah that rules not from the cities and places of power, but rather the Messiah who meets you where you are and gives you new understandings about life in all the multifarious aspects of your life.

Continuing with this metaphor, we see that Jesus asks Simon to put the boat out to deeper water and let down their newly washed nets. Simon and his buddies have been fishing for hours and have not caught much, symbolic of the hard work of peasant people who work hard but have little to show for their efforts. But Jesus asks them to look deeper in their lives, and not simply accept the injustice of the systems which prove to be oppressive to them. With their nets (i.e., souls) cleaned, they are ready to listen to the words of Jesus which can liberate them and bring them a catch that will fill them in body and spirit.

Jesus' life from the very first chapter of Luke's gospel is seen as one which will bring liberation and justice to the people. Prophetic announcements by Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah have all forecasted the blessing of the two baby cousins, John and Jesus, who will help put the world on God's course rather than the course of empire.

And here at the start of his public ministry, he asks people to look deeper into their hearts, minds, and souls to see that the injustices of the present age are not working for them. When they are simply accepting the reality of being people who barely have enough to live on, Jesus lets them know of a message that will bring them an abundance – of a value system that could change the world. This is what the “Messiah,” whom he has already been alluded to by those considered to have unclean spirits (a reference to those who have capitulated to a system of selfishness?), is to do – change the world from one of injustice to one of justice, from one of war to one of peace, from one of fear and hatred to one of courage and love.

Like so many who think change is impossible, or will only make things worse, Simon begins to argue with Jesus – pointing out that their efforts have brought them little thus far. Yet, he acts on trust of one who he cannot deny has a wisdom that is not common. His trust is rewarded in this vignette, which is less about all the fish they caught than it is about them catching the spirit of Jesus himself. They bring in a haul of fish so great that it begins tearing the nets. But Jesus tells him that what is more important is not the fish they have just caught, but the people they, together, will catch.

Any fisherman of that day knew that when you get a large catch of fish, you don't necessarily keep all of the fish. They are sorted out between the 'keepers' and those that are not good for eating. Likewise, Jesus spoke to a large crowd, but he would select only 12 disciples. To those who will heed his call to drop what they are doing and leave behind their boats, houses, families, and synagogues, they will go with him to be fishers of people. Jesus has asked them to cast a wide net, but only a select group of fish (i.e., disciples and followers) will be kept to journey with him and begin a new life dedicated to helping others catch the spirit of the Messiah. Only those who put out into the deep waters of seeing a new vision for the world, who are willing to transform their values and lifestyles, and leave all they thought was formerly important behind them, will travel the way of Jesus. Yes, there will be a wide net that attracts large crowds to hear him preach, watch him heal, and even feed the multitudes, but only a small percentage of them will actually stay with him and live by his ways. Many will be caught up in the net of novelty, but the 'keepers' are the ones who actually follow in Christ's ways.

Simon Peter's fear at realizing the vision of following Jesus is apropos. Who wouldn't have concerns and fears of leaving the synagogue, home, and career you had to become a vagabond of virtue? His whole life and relationships are about to change dramatically. The fear in him has him suggest to Jesus that he is not one whom Jesus should call as his disciple, for he is a sinful man who sees the blessings of his teachings and the power of his miracles as threats to his sense of identity. Who he has been is not who Jesus is calling him to be.

But Jesus does not see him for who he was, but for who he believes he can be. In affirming that he used to fish for fish, but will now fish for people, Jesus informs him that he will simply need to transfer his skillset that he already has to different purposes in his life. He has sought for what was too small and limiting as his means of livelihood, but now he is called to set his sights on the larger catch of changing the hearts and minds of people...helping them to catch the spirit of love, justice, and peace for all peoples, and not just the ones who are hoarding the goods of the world. Simon and others recognize they are caught up in this vision of a better world, and they want to be part of making it happen. They leave everything they know and own to follow the one who will give them deeper understanding and help them to fill their nets with those who will be faithful to the calling of the Messiah.

How can we catch the Spirit that was in Jesus? How would our lives be transformed if we decided to follow in Christ's ways rather than throwing out nets to catch recognition and wealth, fame and fortune? What does it mean for us to fish for people?

