

Sermon

Epiphany 5C February 9, 2025

Luke 5:1-11

Epiphany is the season of manifestation and revelation. From the wise men to the baptism, from the wedding wine to the fulfillment of Isaiah, Jesus is revealed and manifested as the Son of God and Messiah. And today we have the miraculous catch of fish, revealing Jesus to have other-worldly powers. Even though this is yet another gospel passage revealing who Jesus is, there's another aspect to this passage I want to focus on, and that is us.

In today's gospel we learn that Simon is a business partner with James and John. The boys have been fishing all night but have caught nothing, so now they're back on the shore cleaning their equipment when Jesus shows up asking to borrow a boat from which to teach the people. After he finishes speaking, he tells Simon to take the boat out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Here's where it gets interesting.

Before Jesus' baptism and public ministry, what was his most likely occupation? Most likely he was a carpenter, like Joseph. And where did he live? He lived in Nazareth. Nazareth is about 40 miles, maybe a four-day walk, from Lake Gennesaret (aka Lake Galilee). So Jesus was raised and lived most of his life in an inland town, about four days from a major body of water, making his living as a carpenter.

Now imagine this scene: Jesus, a land-locked carpenter almost his entire life, looks at Simon, a man who probably lived all his life by the water and grew up with fishing in his blood, and says, "Go back out and drop your nets for a catch."

Simon replies (probably with more than a hint of exasperation), "Dude . . . we've been out all night and caught nothing. But if you say so . . ." All the while probably muttering under his breath, "Who does this guy think he is?" He and his partners go out to prove that the carpenter doesn't know a thing about fishing and they wind up catching enough fish that their boats almost sink. And you know the rest of the story.

As I said, there are two things about us in this story I want to look at.

The first is that we can get so caught up in our own stuff that we fail to see other options or other ways of doing things. In Simon Peter's case, he had been a fisherman his whole life. He knew how to do his job. So when he didn't catch any fish the night before, that's just the way it was – until Jesus showed up.

I saw something online last week that told how Sara Tabitha Babbit, a Massachusetts Shaker, was watching lumber workers waste time cutting wood. So she attached a saw blade to a spinning wheel and invented the circular saw.

None of us like to be told we're doing things wrong, especially when it's in our area of expertise. But sometimes we need an outsider's perspective. Sometimes we get to a point where we need to try something different. This was Jesus – try it again with me here.

The other thing to notice here is that, even though Simon is the primary character in this story, he is not alone.

Jesus gave Simon a different way of doing something and the results were overwhelming. His nets were overwhelmed to the breaking point. The boats were overwhelmed to the point of sinking. Simon himself was emotionally overwhelmed to the point of asking Jesus to go away. But buried in the story is a line you might have missed: *So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them.*

We need to remember that things Jesus asks us to do very rarely rely on us doing them alone. Parish ministries rely on teamwork. Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs. Christianity itself is based on community. We are not alone.

I was in a bar last week and had yet another conversation with a patron on why church was important. Yes, there is an individual aspect to our faith, but church provides a community in which to learn, to be supported, and to be held accountable. Without a community to provide help, our nets break and our boats sink.

Epiphany is the season of manifestation and revelation. We are now halfway through this revelatory season and Lent begins with Ash Wednesday in less than a month. As we begin the move into that season of self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, and self-denial, today's gospel touches on both Epiphany and Lent.

It touches on Epiphany by pointing once again to Jesus as the one to follow. It also touches on Lent with its directive to listen to Jesus and repent.

As we approach Lent, what are we doing that we have always done that might need changing? Are we willing to listen to Jesus, no matter how begrudgingly, and be open to a new way of doing things? Are we willing to repent of the sin of selfishness and allow others to provide help? Are we willing to be more involved in our community through stewardship of our Time, Talent, and Treasure?

As this Epiphany season winds down, let us keep our eyes and ears open for new ways of seeing and hearing Christ in our lives. As we prepare for the upcoming season of Lent, let us be willing to repent of those thoughts and actions which draw us away from God and giving rise to the sin of selfishness.

And then, as it was with Simon, we just might find our nets and boats filled to the breaking point, needing to rely on our friends to help manage the abundance.

Amen.