

Luke 5:1-11 ~ *From Now On*  
Communion Meditation ~ February 6, 2022  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany ~ Sacraments of Baptism & Holy Communion  
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*Introduction*

Did you ever notice how people are changed in the Bible? It's not so much in their statements, but in the conversation between people and God. I'm not just talking about conversations that involve words. The unexpected splash of baptismal water can be a conversation, or the swallowing of a microscopic speck of bread and juice. Conversations through words and Sacraments, can ignite the awesome power of the Holy Spirit to change how we see ourselves, others, and this old broken world of ours.

I'm sure you've had conversations that changed your whole day. Sometimes even your whole life. And not always for the better. Right now, you are about to hear a whopper of a story about a conversation that happened between Jesus and Simon Peter one day on the Lake of Gennesaret (a.k.a the Sea of Galilee). I invite you as I read, to *enter the text* and feel the flow of its arguments, get stuck in its points of tension, and struggle with its unfolding plot in all its twists and turns. In that experience *God's revelation can happen to us...* as we listen to our Bible which is not so much in the business of, "easy answers and shortcuts to confidence and authority," but rather invites us again and again, to the posture of *wonder, humility, rebuke, and smallness* in the face of the unknown.

Watch how this happens to Simon. By placing ourselves in this text as I read it, may you hear the voice of Christ speaking to you.<sup>i</sup>

*Communion Meditation*

When I was a first-year college student, I saw a sign on my dormitory bulletin board I still remember nearly fifty years later. It was actually an advertisement, which read, "*Don't just study harder. Study smarter.*" I guess it struck me at the time, because I was struggling that year, trying as hard as I could, and getting very few A's, plenty of B's, and even a C or two. I kept thinking if I just studied harder and longer, I could get better grades. If I could pull a few more all-nighters, the way my friends did, then I would be getting straight A's. But this poster caught me by surprise. It made me think for the first time: Maybe it wasn't the number of hours I put in, but *the way I was studying* that was the problem.

How many of us, whether it is a problem in school, at work or at home just keep doing the same thing but more of it. Maybe shout a little louder, or quietly dig in our heels more firmly, hoping that something, somehow will get better. You may have heard the quote attributed to Albert Einstein, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Whoever actually originated this idea, it definitely speaks to something most of us do more often than we'd like to admit. And then we wonder why we are just getting more tired, more burnt out. Ready to give up.

We are all creatures of habit, whether it is how we get through our day, how we navigate our relationships, including how we relate to Christ. In the training I received back in the 1990's to lead the midweek youth program called LOGOS, they told us something stuck with me about Christian spiritual formation. They said, that becoming a Christ follower, "*is more caught than taught.*" Yes, this was a program in a Presbyterian church, where we highly value the importance of education and teaching. But the important point, especially for us, cerebral, lead-with-our heads Presbyterians, is this: It's about experiencing love. It's about seeing grace in action. It's about conversations that lift us to a new place we have never been before. That is when Christ becomes visible and real.

Did you notice how it was the boats shockingly swamped with fish based on a fishing tip from a carpenter's son who grew up in land-locked Nazareth, rather than the lesson outline of what Jesus taught that day that stuck? We have no record of what he taught from the boat, we are given great detail about Jesus' conversation with Simon Peter. Notice, first of all that it was Jesus who initiated the conversation with Peter. Jesus noticing, perhaps, what swirl of confusion and longing actually lay underneath the swagger and fast talking schtick that Simon showed the rest of the world. Jesus seeing, both the problems *and* the potential roiling within that fisherman whose boat he'd commandeered for the day. And so, Jesus invited himself in, to give Peter a way out.

How many of us wake up and just don't see a way out? Mental health is in a crisis here in our country—in every community and neighborhood. As Jenice Armstrong wrote in the Philadelphia Inquirer: "Depression and anxiety don't discriminate. They don't care about beauty. They don't care about money. They don't care about fame. They don't care how many advanced degrees a person may have. They don't care about glamorous TV jobs. And they certainly don't care about beauty queen titles." Yes, she was writing about the tragedy of Cheslie Kryst who had all those things and more. And yet, at thirty years old, the beauty queen and Emmy Award-winning TV correspondent died a week ago today, by suicide. That was the only way out she could see last Sunday morning.

Hers is not the first suicide after which even those who knew her well said, "Nobody saw this coming." One in five Americans will experience mental illness in a given year, according to the CDC. And these past two years have made things worse. "The truth is this pandemic has really changed the game for all of us. What it has most taught us is that everything that looks one way on the surface is not necessarily how it appears," pointed out Argie Allen-Wilson, a Philadelphia-based relationship therapist. She also offers important advice for all of us, "Look out for the strong ones." The truth is, you just never know.<sup>ii</sup>

Now we know that Cheslie Kryst could not see a way out. Although none of us will ever know what she was going through, it seems like she got to the point where she could not see how things could change or get better or be different. We need things to be different. That's why we are here today, I believe, communing with the one who said to Simon Peter essentially, "From now on...your life will be different." "From now on, you don't have to be stuck in the same old

stuff. Same old ways.” Stick with me and things will be different. Jesus gives us an out. If we have ears to hear and hearts to stay in the conversation.

“I don’t know what today will bring, but we need something different. We can’t keep continuing with more of the same, we’re dying.” This is what Jeanelle Austin, said at the protest she attended in Minneapolis this week, draped in a white comforter not unlike the blanket Mr. Amir Locke had over him when he was killed on Wednesday morning in his home in an early morning raid by the police. No Jeanelle, you are right, we can’t keep continuing with more of the same on the streets of Minneapolis or anywhere justice is denied again and again. This holds true for us beyond the scope of human relationships and systems. We know that because we are not changing, the climate is—and not for the better. Science tells us: if we don’t change our ways our planet is dying. This call for change in how we take and give to our ecosystem, could not be clearer.

Friends, in this story I hear good news, great news for all creatures and for our planet. It is a story of a conversation that led to amazing change. And I believe we are here participating in this worship service because we believe, we want to believe in the One who came to change us. We just baptized Jade into conversation with the One who can change us and save us. And I pray when she grows up and comes to church to have her child baptized, we won’t be having the same conversation about the same problems grinding us down. But how?

Let’s listen again to what Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Do not be afraid, from now on, you will be catching people.” Truth is, we’re all afraid, and so was Peter. That’s why he said it there. That’s why the phrase “fear not” (to use the King James version) appears 365 times in our Bible. We need to hear that phrase every day of the year, don’t we? Jesus knows we are afraid. Jesus also knew Peter. Jesus knew Peter, his number one draft pick for the twelve disciples, would continue to make spectacular blunders, just like us. Like Peter, even after we have said “yes” to Christ, we keep saying things, hurtful things we don’t mean. We keep doing dumb things, we may not even understand why we keep doing them.

That’s another important takeaway from this story about Simon Peter. The “From now on” change that Jesus is talking about here, is *not* “from now on you will have a perfect life, you will always be right, and you will never suffer pain or discomfort. If that’s what you came for, you came to the wrong place. If that’s what you are looking for, you need to find a different savior. From Jesus we receive an invitation, a “from now on, that is centered on forgiveness that frees us for positive change. Yes: when Jesus said, “from now on you will be catching people” he meant from now on, “stay in conversation with me and I will show you how to give and receive grace. From now on, your circle of concern is as wide and deep as mine. Come with me and be the bringers of good news to the poor and release to the captives.”

Let’s talk about the “catching people” part of that phrase. Over time we have commandeered it to mean converting people to Christianity. But there is more to it: a backstory that suggests an alternative primary meaning in its original context. The truth is: Jesus’ use of the fish metaphor right here, was neither original to him, nor was its primary meaning about

spiritual conversion. Right in line with Lukan portrait of prophet Jesus from Mary's Magnificat through to his first sermon, he was echoing a metaphor employed by Jeremiah (Jer. 16:16) Amos (Amos 4:2) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 29:4), who all employed the idea of hooking fish as Yahweh's judgment upon those who exploited the poor and defied God's call for justice and righteousness.<sup>iii</sup> Yes, Jesus was calling Peter and his cohorts, to a whole new life a whole new way of being that centered on following Christ. And yes, Jesus was calling them to join him in his call to overturn the existing order of power. To right the wrong, to pave the way for justice, to work for systemic change.

Jesus caught Peter's attention with all those fish that nearly swamped his boat. That conversation compelled him to leave that wealth of product behind and never look back. How has Jesus caught your attention? Here's the invitation to all of us, it's not "Don't study harder, study smarter. It's this: **Don't stay stuck in your old ways—stay in conversation with Christ.** Stay "glued" in conversation with Christ, and neither you nor the world will ever be the same.

Come to the table, Jesus has some things to talk with you about.

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<sup>i</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*, (HarperOne: New York, NY, 2010), pp. 89-97.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/chelsie-kryst-regina-king-suicide-mental-health-20220201.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Ched Myer, *Binding the Strong Man*, p. 132, as quoted in <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany5c>