



Rev. Anne Jensen - Epiphany 5C Luke 5:1-11

The possibilities for sermon themes from this week’s gospel are so rich that it is hard to know which one to choose. Here are the most obvious choices: God meets us in our daily lives; what happens to us when we encounter the presence of the Holy One of God; the call and the fear that rises within in us; and catching people. As you can tell, there are lots of connecting points, but what catches my attention in this story is the magnificence of God’s generosity towards us and Peter’s response. I’ll come back to this, but first, let’s get oriented to time and place.



Jesus is standing on the edge of the lake of Gennesaret—this is another name for the body of water known as the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberius. The crowd was pushing in to hear him better and he probably feared being driven into the water, so he looks for a way to build in a little distance.

Aha! He sees a couple of fishing boats—the fishermen are off washing their nets. Jesus gets in Simon’s boat, apparently Simon agrees to this. They go out a little distance and Jesus teaches from there. Everything seems normal up to that point. But when Jesus is through teaching he turns to Simon and says, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

Now Simon is tired, and he’s had a lousy night—he hasn’t caught a thing, not one fish! Now think of a commercial fisherman around here and you probably think Simon would tell this teacher off and tell him to quit wasting his time. However, Simon Peter is respectful, if doubtful, and does what Jesus says. Simon caught so many fish he had to get his partners to come out and help him. They filled both boats so full they started to sink. Here’s the crucial point: Simon doesn’t stay focused on the catch of fish. Everyone else is focused on the fish. Simon Peter falls at Jesus’ knees saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” This is a huge change for Peter. Jesus has said nothing to elicit this kind of response from Peter.

This is the Epiphany moment: an epiphany is an “aha” moment of new understanding, a revelation. It’s like a light bulb goes off—new light offers new understanding. Peter calls Jesus *Lord*; now anyone who was a master over

another could be Lord, a title of respect, but Simon Peter is speaking in another dimension altogether. In this incredible moment he realizes the spiritual truth of his own smallness in the presence of the Holy. It is the truth clutching at his heart—he can barely stand it. Only one who has experienced intimacy with God could convey what Jesus offers Simon Peter. “Do not be afraid,” words of compassion and understanding. Jesus is opening a whole new world to Simon. It’s still up to Simon whether to enter this new world.

The magnificence of God’s generosity towards us human beings is incredible! —Jesus is offering new life to Peter, and Jesus offers new life to us. Jesus could have said to Simon, “You’re absolutely right; you are a sinner, and the only appropriate place for you is to stay right where you are, on your knees, suffering in the awareness of your sinful life, but he does nothing of the kind.

Do you remember the movie *Chocolat* ? When I saw it, I thought it was a profoundly religious film. If you haven’t seen it, you might want to rent it. One of my parishioners, scoffingly referred to it as redemption by Godiva, and actually he wasn’t far off. *Chocolat* is a fable. Some external force has brought Vianne and her daughter to a French village in 1959. Life there is very conventional, one would even say rigid. Vianne opens a chocolate shop at the beginning of Lent. The town’s most prominent and powerful citizen promises her that she will be out of business by Easter, such is the insult to the sensibilities of the town that they should all be tempted by chocolate when everyone knows you can’t eat chocolate during Lent.



Chocolate is the metaphor for God’s love, and Vianne gives it away liberally. We have close-ups of cocoa beans being crushed, chocolate being chopped and then melted and stirred into a luscious mixture that makes your mouth water and your heart race! And there’s so much of it! There are truffles, ten different kinds of candy, cookies, cakes, tartes, bonbons, shells, kisses, and, of course, hot chocolate with whipped cream.

Now what does this have to do with being called to be a catcher of people? Vianne has a shadowy past, yet she is a catcher of people. She, like Jesus, invites people. She is more generous than anyone the village people have ever known. She welcomes the timid, the outcasts, the very old and the very young. She does not judge. She gives them chocolate and opens them to a world of hope and possibilities. She herself is one who catches people. She tries to find just the right

chocolate for each individual, just the right kind to make each person's life better, fuller, richer. Chocolate is the symbol of gracious love.

Vianne's generosity is in stark contrast to self-righteousness found in some of the church members, who are acting a lot like Pharisees. They too are offered chocolate, but refuse.

Going back to today's gospel, when Jesus asks Peter to row out to deep water and lower the nets, he is inviting Peter to experience the abundance that is available to those who accept the invitation to follow him. Jesus is not worried about Peter's sense of unworthiness. He says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." "Do not be afraid..." Never mind your inadequacy; I will give you what you need to do the job I have for you." We hear echoes from our story of Isaiah, who says, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips..." And then the seraph purifies his lips that they may speak God's word.

What is God calling us to? Is God calling us to extend Christ's love and generosity in a way that invites the outsider in, much as Vianne invites the timid and the hurting people of the village into her chocolate shop? There IS a call. Life never stays the same. Is God calling us to rethink and reshape our energies right where we are? God is always greater and more creative than we can imagine, and God calls us to flow and change and grow as partners in the work of creation and reconciliation. There is a call! We can be catchers of people in the same sense that Vianne is in the fable. We can offer God's love and welcome in a way that meets others where they are. Here is a call!

There is rich imagery in the story of Peter's call. The sea, in scripture, is a symbol of God's deep and vast mystery—an ocean of grace where abundance abounds. And Peter? He is the symbol of all of us—all the disciples through the ages who are struggling to respond to Jesus.

--Peter "catches" God's superabundant grace

--Peter is "caught" by the power and promise of God

--Peter is sent out "to catch people," to embrace us and save us within the vast and safe net of God's care.

The actual Greek word means "catch alive continuously." These fishermen were not using a hook and line, but rather the nets were thrown wide and they scooped up every kind of fish in the sea. God throws the nets wide. To be "caught alive" is to be rescued, not captured—it is to be strengthened, not weakened—it is to be drawn into the abundant grace of God's kingdom. All of this calling and all of this catching begins with God's initiative—God catching us and claiming us and calling us. But it ends with our response—our response of trust and risk and hope. It ends with our surrender to the holy, our willingness to change, our courage to say, "Here am I, Lord...send me." Amen