

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Dr. Jennifer Lord
Sunday, August 25, 2022

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and 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.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Holy wisdom. Holy word. Thanks be to God.

What an honor and a joy to be with you this day for this celebration Ordination to Word and Sacrament for Courtney Veasey. What a blessing! We at Austin Seminary, we know how fortunate we are that she chose to come to us for her Master of Divinity degree. Personally I am so grateful to be here with you in person. I love what the children did pressing their hands to make that stole, but I had one too many long-distance pandemic ordinations where I couldn't even be there to give such a thing, and we were sending in photographs of our hands for the soon to be Right of Laying on of Hands. What a joy to be here and look forward to that moment in the service. This congregation, although I am just meeting you, also holds a special place for me because as one teaching at Austin Seminary, that means that I have been privileged to overlap for so many years with the now retired New Testament Professor Louis Donaldson. Idlewild, his home church, his parents Louis and Janice. Yes. So I spoke with him about being here, and I know that this place is in his heart. What a joy and a day to remember that we are gathered here in the presence of one another and with those who join by Livestream and, most certainly, with the communion of saints. Thanks be to God.

Well, this morning as we gather as the Body of Christ in this place, we will a little bit later in the service be focused on this table. And we will, according to the bulletin, in decent order make our Great Thanksgiving at table, our Great Thanksgiving to God, before receiving the bread and the cup. And this morning, I just happen to know, we will be praying a more modern prayer. Some of you may know it; for some of you it may be new. The prayer itself is both old and new. It's new because it is a 20th century penned prayer; but it is old because the prayer writer, a renowned liturgical linguist, is not only immersed in scriptural language, not only knows the forms of the church's deepest and oldest patterns of table prayers, but she has studied the

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remarkable prayers and sermons of the church fathers and mothers, like John of Damascus Romanos, the Melodious, Chrysostom, Julian, Hildegard, and on. This prayer writer studied their embrace of scripture's images for God because she knows the images for God show us the ways of God. The prayer that we will pray is a bath of scriptural images from one deeply formed in the prayer life of the church apostolic. And to say a little bit more about Gail Ramshaw-- in her book, *Treasures Old and New*, she writes about more images. She collected 40 images from scripture; and if you turn to the back of that book and look at the appendices, you will find that she has connected scriptural images to every Sunday of the year, and she's working with certain lectionary patterns, patterns of reading scripture. So if you flip to the back of that book, you'll find the images that she highlights for Advent Year A or Pentecost Year C or a Sunday like today in Ordinary Time--always three images.

Now, Courtney, you know that I've borrowed from another Church's lectionary tradition for this morning's texts, so here are the three scriptural images for today: fish, coal, and treasure. First, let's go to the water's edge. There certainly are connections between the gospel story in Luke and our gathering here today. The last verse of that passage echoes this ordination day. "And they left everything and followed him." So today this ordinand in our midst is a sign of how the call of Christ on your life can radically alter your sense of your purpose and work. Courtney changed careers. She changed zip codes, and then with the pandemic changed back again, and then went back. You let yourself become a student. You let yourself become a graded student once again. What a response to the call of Christ, a verse and a story fitting for this occasion! But there's another really good connection from the text according to the installation--Associate Pastor of Outreach and Nurture. Surely that's something about fishing. I suppose the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee might have used this text for study and guidance, writing the job description something like "Idlewild desires an associate pastor for fishing. Read on for details, for as Jesus said, 'Do not be afraid, for from now on you will be catching people.'"

But every time I hear this catch of fish story, whether it's here in Luke's gospel or later in John's gospel, every time I hear this fishing story, I tell you I have another image that comes to my mind. In my mind I see a little wooden church in a small coastal town of California. There's not much square footage to that church. It might even fit in this sanctuary's footprint. It's a redwood, shingled structure. I think there's an entryway. My memory is that there's one fellowship room that doubles as Sunday school if that happens, a kitchenette, a small classroom, a sanctuary. Not many Christians in that town of Point Reyes anymore, but still that Presbyterian Church with one stained glass window. The window somehow catches all of the mood colors of the nearby sea. There are sunset purples and gold, stormy gray green, sunshine blue--it's a modern window with its varied color tones and carefully leaded lines. The lines are slightly curved, but they always intersect with each other. Somehow the creator of that window, with just ocean colors and simple lines, created the net from this gospel story; and, at least for me all of the sudden sitting there in that space, I see that in between the net lines are fish. The small window, a humble church structure, and an artist who completely presents the net and the fish of this story. No depiction of Simon Peter, James, or John; no boat, no Jesus, simply the net and the fish. So while according to this text I am always to follow Christ whatever be my work and place in the world, yes; and while according to this text I am charged to go fishing, yes. Following and fishing are always,

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always our participation in the divine life of God; but with gentle declaration of that ever-present stained glass window in that church, it is like a mirror. And all of the sudden I am one of the fish. I am in that net. We are the fish who have been caught up in God's net. God's net catches us again and again. Our souls need to be caught again and again, and any fishing we do is as those who have also been caught in God's divine net

Simon Peter's reaction in the story points to this, his reaction to the boats full of fish, his reaction to the boats sinking for the weight of the catch. It was a reaction of fear of the Lord. Strikingly, he utters a rebuke of Jesus, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Simon Peter fears Jesus the teacher, Jesus the fish catcher. Simon Peter sees who this is, and he is fearful. Simon Peter even uses the very same title that the angel of God did back a few chapters when announcing Jesus' birth. Simon too calls Jesus Lord. Kyrios, a shocking acknowledgment that this one teaching at the shores of the Sea of Galilee on that regular day is none other than the God of the burning bush, the God of the primordial deep, the God who will go to his own death for the life of the world. Kyrios, Lord, the Great I Am, out in a boat netting fish. And this one, this Holy One, says put out into deep water and let your nets down for a catch, for people are lost in the deep waters of life. Nations are suffering as waves of violence and scarcity and corruption crash over them. And even if we have a sense of privilege or security, still we have days when we barely can hold our heads above the waters; and Jesus says, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Ah, Ordinand, his net, his catch. We are his catch; we cast his net. You too are a fish safely caught up in God's divine net of tender care. May you always call the Lord Kyrios when you go fishing.

From the water's edge let us go to the throne room. Isaiah's vision there, Kyrios, Lord, the Great I Am, is seated high on a throne, the very hem of his robe, his garment filling the temple space with the sixth winged seraphim, those royal attendants flitting about. We are in the Holy One's presence, and it is frightening. Even the seraphim veil their eyes in the presence of God's glory. And with Simon Peter again it is a confession of our sin before the most high. Woe is me. I am lost, for I am one of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the king. Isaiah, the prophet here, acknowledging his nation's waywardness from the ways of God. The Holy One sits enthroned. Can you imagine in this space smoke filling the space, the foundation shaking. What will happen when a seraphim brings a live coal from the altar and with a pair of tongs touches the lips of the Prophet, declares forgiveness of sins? But more than that, oh the phrasing, declares guilt departed, sin blotted out, all with the touch of a live coal.

In one tradition of the church where Holy Communion, the Eucharist, is integral to every Sunday worship service, in that tradition people come forward to receive the cup and the bread; and when all have returned to their places, the priest turns around again and faces the people and holding out the communion chalice declares, "Behold, this coal has touched your lips. All iniquities are blotted out." Again and again the Holy One in glory blotting out our sin, blotting out our estrangement from life abundant, the Holy One blotting out our internal and outward fragmentation, the Holy One blotting out the ways we disparage the life God gives, blotting out all the ways we do not live as we were created to be in harmony and wholeness. We Presbyterians may not say that sentence but it is operative nonetheless. With each Holy

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Communion it is God's forgiveness, it is God feeding us into life. Each Holy Communion a covenant meal, our alignment afresh with the ways of God in our lives with one another, in our daily walks in the world, this Holy One in glory, whose garment's hem fills the temple, does this. May today's remembrance of baptism assure all of us again that we are covered with that holy garment. Today my wearing this alb is my wearing a very old signal of that garment of baptism. May all of us know again we are covered with that glory. We too are made to sing holy, holy, holy, heaven and earth are full of God's glory. That coal has touched our lips.

It is that glory that dwells in us, a treasure in clay jars, that glory in earthen vessels. That treasure is the glory of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. Paul tells us it is the treasure of the glory of God that we bear Jesus Christ in our bodies. That means we bear the death of the one who has put to death the powers of sin and death. To bear this treasure means that we move about, we frail and earthen as we are, bearing this very life that overcame the powers of evil and death, we do. He lives in us in this way. It is sealed in our baptism and released in each Holy Communion, and we bear this treasure. We each bear this glory by God's grace. Even as we are afflicted and perplexed and persecuted and struck down, this glory still shines through. Oh, it does.

Some of you may know better than I the image of broken pottery that is not repaired in such a way to hide the breakage, but pottery that is repaired using precious treasured metals--gold, silver, platinum—so the cracks and the fissures in the pottery are made to show and to gleam.

One of my longtime colleagues at the seminary, David White, has just published a book about glory, about beauty; and he writes, "To know a thing does not involve simply mapping its facts, but to know a thing also involves perceiving its expressive light." To truly know a thing does not involve simply mapping its facts, but to know it is also to perceive its expressive light. Can we see this? Can we move about our days not only mapping the facts and making our judgments and summarizing everything with one glance? Instead can we look at strangers and friends and even the ones that we know the best and see the splendor, the lumen, the manifested mystery and majesty and the glory? Can we look for it, the glory that shines in the world and in each of us, in each of us choosing to dwell in our earthen vessel selves? All of us by virtue of our baptism are Christ's ministers. May we who move about looking for luminosity in one another, in the world that God loves, be strengthened for that work.

Now even this homiletician could say that these words have tipped a little bit more towards a charge than sermonic form, setting out in our midst on this ordination day these images fish and nets and coal and garment and broken vessels and glory. But one thing we know--these images that arise from scripture are not anything that we conjure up. To use a liturgical theologian's words, these are images and symbols that handle us. And I know, Courtney, that you know this. You and I do not handle the images and symbols of faith; they handle us. Today you will stand at the table with the bread and the cup, but that bread and the cup that you touch and hold and pass, that bread and cup holds the entire cosmos. Indeed each one of us, we handle with care because they are the coal held out, they are the net catching us up, they are the treasure poured into us, pastoral imagination formed by the depth and breadth of our life in the holy triune God. You, soon to be steward of the mysteries of Christ, you arise from the assembly to do your work to

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serve this assembly. May you and all of us hear afresh and know today that we are held in the loving arms of the crucified, risen one who is our life, our mercy, our might, our table, our food, our server, our rainbow, our ark, our dove, our sovereign, our water, our wine, our light, our treasure, our tree, our way, our truth, our life.

Glory to God.
Amen.