“Participation”

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Psalm 138; Luke 5:1-11

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***Psalm 138***

***I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; 2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. 3 On the day I called, you answered me; you increased my strength of soul. 4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth. 5 They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. 6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he perceives from far away. 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.***

***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, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 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******. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. 7 So 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******. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 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.” 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.***

Last week we read about Jesus escaping the crowd that ran him out of town by just walking through them, with or without the Hollywood smoke and mirrors. Being run out of town just proved the point that Jesus had just made, that no prophet is accepted in his home town.

When Jesus left Nazareth, he went to Capernaum another city in Galilee, and began to teach and perform miracles. The gospel of Luke tells us that first Jesus healed a man with unclean spirits by commanding the spirits to come out of the man. Then Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law and she got up and began to serve the guests. Then many others brought their sick and suffering to Jesus for him to lay hands on and cleanse and heal. After what must have been a long day, Jesus got up early and went out to a more deserted place to rest. The crowd searched for him and found him there and wanted him to come back and continue healing, but Jesus told them “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” **44**So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:43-44).

I have mentioned before that each gospel writer has an agenda that leads them to write about some of the same events in different ways. For the writer of the gospel of Luke, his strategy was to change the order of events slightly to more effectively make a point. This week’s scripture from Luke is one of these examples. Matthew and Mark both describe Jesus calling his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee too. But in Matthew and Mark, there is no indication that Simon has ever met Jesus before. Luke makes a point to include the part early in Jesus’ ministry when he goes to Simon’s house and heals Simon’s mother in law, *before* this scene of the fishermen at the shore. In Matthew and Mark, the healing of Simon’s mother in law comes *after* Jesus has called his first disciples.

Also the calling of the first disciples in the gospel of Luke takes 10 verses, contrast with Matthew and Mark which each only give the calling two verses.

How do these differences inform the meaning of our scripture verses for today? With 10 verses of narrative we have a lot more information including dialogue to give us a greater sense of the moment. And the location of the narrative as *after* the healing of Simon’s mother in law means that when Simon sees Jesus and is asked to put his boat out into the water a little further, he is already motivated to do what Jesus asks because he has met Jesus and *already* trusts him at least a little. “Simon Peter knows that Jesus is powerful and different because he knows that Jesus healed his sick mother-in-law.”6 When Simon sees Jesus at the shore, Simon has *already* seen a miracle of Jesus. What Simon doesn’t know yet is that he is about to have a miracle of Jesus *of his own*.

First Jesus has only asked that the boat be put out a little further from the shore, so Jesus can then teach to the larger crowd on shore that has gathered.

“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.”

Part of so many call narratives end with me wondering what compelled people to follow Jesus’ instructions, not to mention deciding that something was the voice of God and following that. Because Simon Peter had seen Jesus’ healing of his mother in law he trusted Jesus – that trust is what compelled him to take the next step. “Simon Peter’s willingness to acquiesce to Jesus’ request to go out a little ways in his boat is *based on experience*.”6

**Trust begets trust.** “Having seen Simon Peter display trust, Jesus tells him make an act of faith: Jesus commands the fisherman to do the very thing they failed at the night before.”6 It’s the relational trust that is key. By telling this narrative the way he does, Luke offers us a wider message. The miracle may be the overwhelming quantity of fish pulled in after just having spent an entire night catching nothing. But the other miracle in this telling of the narrative this way is the moment and *lasting effect Jesus has on Simon*. The quantity of fish was overwhelming, but it was Simon Peter too who was overwhelmed at the sudden insight. For Simon Peter the miracle of the fish meant something even more astounding. The sudden insight that he was in the presence of the Lord was Simon’s own miracle. Early in the passage Simon referred to Jesus as Master, something akin to Rabbi or Teacher. After this overwhelming insight, things changed.

“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Remember last week when we talked about the beauty and terror simultaneously present if we consider being known and seen completely by God? This is what Simon Peter is experiencing. The beauty of Luke’s version of this narrative is that we get to share this moment between Simon Peter and Jesus. When we read scripture we try to imagine where we might fit in what is described. Today’s scripture invites us to imagine ourselves in this extremely personal relational moment with Jesus.

After displaying his love for Jesus as Lord, Simon Peter immediately confesses. I am a sinful man! This is Simon’s version of the attempt to escape the call from God, part of the pattern typical of call narratives. Jesus doesn’t hear Simon’s confession and then go elsewhere. As God does, God always finds away.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

What fear is it that Jesus tells Simon to cast aside. Do not be afraid – of what? Of Jesus’ power? Of Simon’s awareness of his own sin, maybe shame? Of the changes certain to be ahead for Simon? We don’t know for sure. But it is “clear that Jesus means to not let anything Simon Peter is thinking stop the man from following after Jesus.”6 “Jesus was not looking for perfect leaders, just committed ones.”2 Rather than allowing whatever Simon was afraid of get in his way, Jesus handed him his future despite his fears, telling Simon he would not be catching people. When Simon put his boat out further into the sea and cast his net out yet again despite the previous night’s failure to catch, Jesus gave Simon an “experience of success in the present to help overcome a failure of the past.”2

You might start to think that Jesus would make a great personal coach!

It’s one thing to witness a miracle. It’s another thing completely to participate in your own miracle. In today’s scripture Simon Peter and Jesus each participated in making one step lead to another, one decision leading to another step in the miracle, etc. Jesus asks Simon to put the boat out a little bit – because of earlier trust Simon does, and Jesus teaches. Then Jesus asks Simon to put the boat out further and put out his nets again – asking Simon to trust Jesus further. Because of the step by step partnering through this whole scene both Jesus and Simon were agents of the change in Simon’s life along with the others when they followed Jesus. Taking part in the miracle like he did, Simon increased the benefit to others.

One small act of obedience led to the spread of Jesus’ influence. When miracles happen small things become great things. When miracles happen people around us are also blessed.

Let’s begin to see miracles not just as an amazing piece of goodness for ourselves in response to a particular circumstance. That they are. But they are so much more. Let’s see miracles in our communities, in our societies, our families, our culture. God does not only work miracles with things we can see, hear and touch, but can work miracles with our attitudes, our intentions, our motivations, our underlying values. When we partner *with* Christ in the work of God around us, we are surely bound to cause a miracle.

Let’s pray,

1<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-psalm-138-9>

Creach, Jerome, February 2025

2<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-51-11-8>

Smith, Abraham, February 2025

3, (Psalm) Working Preacher Commentary, Year C, Volume 1, pp.320-325.

4, (Luke) Working Preacher Commentary, Year C, Volume 1, pp.332-337.

5<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-02-03/psalm-138-10/>

Hoezee, Scott, February 2025

6 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-02-03/luke-51-11-4/> (Luke)

Harmon, Chelsey