

Trinity V

Luke 5:1-11a

July 17, 2022

Like looking through a kaleidoscope, the interchanges between Peter and Jesus in the gospels give us rich and varied opportunities -not just to picture -but to live into what it would be like for each of us to be with our Lord. Scripture provides snapshots of Peter's all too human personality engaging with the divine human who is Jesus. These glimpses of divine-human moments involving Peter remind us of ourselves, of our own strengths and weaknesses, our quirks and crannies. They allow us to reflect as well on what we must be like to Jesus. What would he think us as we stood with Him? Taken together, seeing how Jesus relates to Peter in the times from Galilee to Golgotha, these interactions allow us to appreciate just how He loves us..AND, Just as for Peter, He loves us certainly more than to let us remain the way we are.

We know from the gospel of John that Peter and Andrew had gone searching for a closer walk with God. They had journeyed all the way into Judea to hear John's news of the Lamb of God. Now, back at the lake, Peter and his partners had been fishing all night and had come up empty-handed. That is all they had been able to do by themselves. If we have had some little experience in the spiritual life, we will recognize that this is often our situation, too. How many efforts we have made to rid ourselves of this or that attachment, to forget slights and injuries, to adapt ourselves to our loved one's way of doing things, to subject our will to another's! And yet, after all these attempts, we find our hands empty, like Peter's nets.

At the side of the lake, Peter's first reaction to Jesus instruction to let down his nets for a catch was to **trust** the Master's words despite Peter's knowing fishing the lake of Tiberias like a pro and Jesus being a carpenter from distant, dusty Nazareth. All Jesus did was speak to him; Peter's trust in his Master bloomed spontaneously. I want **that** for you and for me!

Had Peter caught some small fish, perhaps our divine master would not have worked a miracle; but Peter had caught nothing, and so through the power and goodness of God his nets were soon overflowing with fish. Such is our Lord's way. He gives as God with divine generosity, but He awaits our humility of heart.

What a miracle it is when perennially proud human beings can be their true selves, true to God, and carry themselves with humility. When human beings show their true colors in humility, and God takes His cue to respond in generosity, miracles happen. The miraculous catch depended just as much upon Peter's miraculous humility as it did upon the Lord meeting Peter right where this humiliated fisherman was.

As the nets burst and the cries of the onlookers mount, Peter exclaims in Jesus' presence, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man". Instantaneously, Peter's consciousness of his own sin floods through him as he feels himself to be in the presence of the holy. Peter's sins are not enough to put Jesus off. Isn't it wonderful that our Lord does not grant the request? Instead, the question-marks that join Jesus's promise of Peter's becoming a "fisher of men" dance in the disciple's lively imagination. In the ensuing enthusiasm of being with Jesus, he lets himself be drawn into whatever adventure the divine human has in store for him.

Next, we hear Peter confessing more than he is aware of, “You are the Christ”, expecting a Christ of sovereign power and kingly might. Like most of us most of the time, we are barely half-right. Because, instead, Jesus shows Himself to be a human God, the Servant God who has a Passion to face. When Peter deigned to rebuke Jesus’ statement that a Cross awaited him, Jesus’ answer smashed Peter’s all too human expectation: “Get behind me, Satan!” Peter now learns what following the call means, and so Jesus calls him a second time: “IF any man would follow me..” As we all know from the stories of the Jesus’ trial and Passion, even though Peter says ‘yes’ to this call to take up his cross, his footsteps falter just as ours inevitably do. He will run from and betray the divine human he calls Master. His humanity is simply showing.

One spring morning back by this same lake, the one who who betrayed meets the One Risen. The conversation that takes place between Jesus and Peter is spell-bindingly good news. It all hinges on a play on words. In Greek, the kind of love that makes for friendship is called “fileo”. The kind of love which is total, unreserved and unconditional is called “agape”.

By the shore, Jesus asks Peter the first time, “Simon, do you ‘agape’ me? In other words, do you love with total, unreserved, unconditional love? Before having had the experience of betraying his Lord, Peter would certainly have said, “OF course, I ‘agape’ you..I love you unconditionally”. Instead, Peter relives the memory of repeatedly denying his Lord. His weakness is showing. So he responds as only he honestly can now, “You know Lord that I “filio-se” you.. that is, “ I love you with my poor, human love”. Jesus comes back to him: “Simon, do you love me with this total love I want?” Peter responds only as he already has, “Lord I love you as I am able

to love you”. Tellingly, the third time, Jesus simply asks, Do you FILEIS-me? Our Lord meets the love Peter has just where he is.

From our Lord’s loving, coming down to earth kind of love, Peter now knows his poor human love is enough for Jesus. Jesus has put himself on Peter’s level rather than Peter on Jesus’ level! It is exactly this divine conformity with humanity **within** Jesus and **that goes out** to Peter that gives hope now to the disciple who betrayed.

It’s amazing how humanly possible it was for Peter and is for us to be in Jesus presence. We can imagine ourselves in the places where Peter’s feet were next to Jesus’, breathing the same air. Occasionally, we too deserve a rebuke like, “ Get Behind Me , Satan” so as to be more able to follow in His footsteps, or..perhaps we need another voice questioning, “Do you love me?” in the heat of vicious argument with the ones we confess we love so dearly. To hear while we are reading scripture our Lord’s conversing and cajoling us, interacting with us on our errands, scolding and nurturing us or, at another moment, to converse spontaneously on a walk or before a family gathering with our Lord is to enjoy some of the intimacy Peter enjoyed in the here and now.

We can be thankful in what a friend-to-friend, down to earth, rough and tumble way Peter’s words landed on the ears of Jesus. We can rejoice in a God who comes down to our level and to this altar.