



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 6, 2022  
ISAIAH 6:1-8; PSALM 138; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11; LUKE 5:1-11

## BODY OF BROKEN BONES



**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 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.]*

When I was in ninth grade, I broke my right arm playing games at my church's youth group one Sunday evening. Technically it was a broken carpal bone in the wrist that connects the radius to the thumb. The bone is scaphoid in shape—that is, boat-shaped, and is therefore called the navicular bone. Navi is Latin for "boat," and this bone, it turns out, is critical to full functioning of the wrist and hand. A bad break of the navicular can lead to bone resorption, chronic pain and loss of range of motion, so my orthopedist had me in a full arm cast for three long itchy months. It healed, and I got the gift of ambidexterity out of the deal. The only limitation that lingered was difficulty doing push-ups during my time in the military, and that did not disappoint me too much.

Thomas Merton once wrote that the Body of Christ is a "body of broken bones." He was not speaking of Jesus' crucified body, in which scripture makes a keen point to say that no bones were broken, but rather Merton is speaking of the Church, as the body of Christ, you and me—we are a body of broken bones. We could say it is the universal character of the human

condition—brokenness. And yet God's interest in looking to us to be that Body of Christ in a broken hurting world precisely because we are broken...and healed...and therefore invited to see our vocation as one of wounded healers in our own right. The blemishes make us beautifully suited to this life in Christ.

We get a lot of talk about sin today, here midway between the Christmas season and Ash Wednesday. Our collect sets the tone: *Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins...* Isaiah acknowledges his unclean lips; Paul confesses he is unfit for this ministry to which he has been called, and in the gospel, Peter tells Jesus to steer clear of him, "for I am a sinful man."

And yet...and yet...the seraph purifies the prophet's lips with a live coal; Paul knows it is God's grace that is working in him to do infinitely more than he could ever ask for or imagine; and Jesus' immediate response to Peter is don't fear all that, come on and let's go fish for people. The theme is there—in each story the sinner, the broken one, is the one called into ministry. A body of broken bones.

It's worth noting a few details of this brief passage from Luke's gospel as an archetypal story of discipleship. First, Peter and his partners were likely familiar with Jesus by now, and they, too, are probably listening with one ear while tending their nets—the tedious work of cleaning and mending and drying their nets after a long, fruitless night of fishing. They were surely weary when Jesus steps into Peter's boat and says put out a little way. Peter complies, drawn into Jesus' orbit of charisma.

In due time, Jesus says put out to deep water and cast your nets there. It was no small ask to mess his nets up after tending them, and surely dubious of the prospects, having just come through a long night of nothing.

And yet despite every justification to the contrary, Peter says, "Master, it's not gonna work, but if you say so, I will." He calls him "master" before the miracle happens. The word here translated "master" is only found in Luke's gospel, and only in reference to Jesus by disciples. "Epistata" is the Greek word, not used for slave-owning master (that is used elsewhere), but it means the one supervising the work. Supervisor. Something's already happening to Peter because this is before the miracle of teeming fish in the nets—so many that they risk sinking the boats. We should hear in this

hyperbole of divine proportions, but it takes Peter's willingness to move into deeper waters of conversion. It takes trust. And that trust changes everything, for Peter, his partners, for you and me, indeed the entire world. Changed because Peter, a self-proclaimed sinful man, is invited by Jesus to follow him.

Peter has fished his entire life, it's what he knew, but he becomes part of a Great Resignation of his time, walking away from his nets, and the fish he could have sold at market, and takes a new job with Jesus as his supervisor. Epistata. He will fish for people for the rest of his life.

We are halfway between Christmas and Lent—midway through this Season in which we hear stories inviting us into full employment as disciples, as the Body of Christ, as a body of broken bones. The reminders of sin in scripture today are not meant to beat us down; rather they are invitations to see that God chooses to work with us and through us, not in spite of that brokenness, but in light of it, and the vulnerable truth it affords us when we are honest with ourselves and with God. Healing comes when we admit that wounded reality.

And conversion comes when we are willing to put out into deeper waters, which is to say the transformative gift of this “life in Christ” won’t likely come if we remain in the shallows where the water stagnates and the turbulence leaves everything murky. Jesus, the epistata, the supervisor on the job, says “go deeper with me.”

I know it’s scary, he says, but do not be afraid. Fear not, echoing the Christmas story according to Luke, just a couple of chapters earlier, when miraculous things happen to those who are amazed.

My friends, on this Sunday when we hold our Annual Parish Meeting, we conduct our business, tending our nets as it were, in

order to keep doing that which we know, but we also take time to celebrate our common life and the ways that the Spirit is moving in our midst, inviting us as a community and individuals into the experience of conversion, calling us to deeper waters, to be amazed but fear not, to be the Body of Christ in whatever ways God may call us to be. But always as a body of broken bones, remembering that it is Christ who calls us into this work, this life, and if we will follow, greater things are in store for us, for this cathedral community, for you and me, than we could ever ask for or imagine.

And for that may God’s holy name be praised.

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