

Barre Congregational Church
February 6, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser
~ Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany ~
“When Christ sees our struggles”
Our sermons and previous worship services can be found on our website at
www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Luke 5 v 1-11

I. Introduction:

Imagine it's a Friday afternoon, and you are finishing up with work, wherever you are, and thinking about the weekend, some chores you must do, some activities with the kids, and more. You're tired and need some rest before the weekend activities start! Suddenly something happens, which will change your life in ways you haven't imagined! I remember many years ago in South Africa, in 1997, when I had a Friday afternoon like that. I was in my office, closing work, and being in a quiet and reflective mode, wondering what my next phase in life is going to look like. I had returned from a job contract in Johannesburg a little while ago, setting up my consulting business in conflict transformation and mediation in Cape Town, and as with any startup business, it took a lot of work, thinking and planning and outreach and networking to get things going. I was thinking about the week's work and wondered about new clients and reports that needed to be finished, when the phone rang around 5pm. It was someone from a peace agency in Connecticut who reached out to me via a mutual friend, to see whether I would be interested in working with them for a three-year period. It would involve traveling to several States and Cities in the US, to work with leaders from all walks of life, implementing training programs in mediation and conflict transformation. My first reaction was to almost fall from my chair, because this sounded too unreal, and secondly, I thought about what such a big decision, leaving South Africa would mean for me and my family back home. We interviewed on that Saturday morning, and after long family conversations, much prayer, and interviews with Board members in Connecticut, I said yes to this invitation. That Friday afternoon would change my life forever. From being concerned about re-entry into the City of Cape Town, all the responsibilities of setting up a consultancy, and the worries and concerns about income, I was now in a completely different space, of getting ready for life in a different country, with God guiding my steps, seeing my heart, hearing my prayers, and recognizing my concerns. I loved my life in Cape Town, and I love my family and friends. This would mean being away from

them and my beloved country. I arrived in the US in September of 1998, and my life would change in many ways, with a variety of involvements, new job offers after the original three-year contract with this peace agency ended, getting to know wonderful people in many parts of the US and abroad, until God showed up again calling me to be here at Barre Congregational Church. It has been an awesome journey since the extraordinary Divine intervention on that Friday afternoon in 1997, not without its ups and downs, and missing my family and country, but a journey where I gained so much, making new friends and colleagues, meeting my dear husband, and filled with a spiritual awareness that God is with me all the time, showing up whenever I needed guidance for the road ahead...

II. Simon and Jesus

My personal journey of being uprooted from a life so familiar, made me wonder about Simon here in our passage. I was imagining Simon and his partners being rather tired after a long night on their boats trying to catch fish for their families. They were cleaning the nets, and were probably closing everything, so they can have some rest. They were ordinary fishermen, who loved what they did, but it was difficult too, because it was unclear when they would have a good catch again. They were worried of course, because with no catch, there was no food for the family. This was their business, and they would have to get up the next day to start all over again. Meanwhile Jesus was busy preaching, surrounded by a large crowd at the Lake of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee. He knew the crowd was closing in and needed another space to preach from. Being in the boat, would give Him a better platform to speak from and with a little distance from the crowd. Simon knew Jesus already, because Jesus healed his mother-in-law not too long ago. He must have listened with one ear to Jesus' preaching, while cleaning the nets.

Jesus had two things in mind, though. By asking Simon to use the boat, He needed the platform, but He also witnessed Simon's distress as He approached him. His second request is for Simon to move the boat deeper into the water and let the nets down for another attempt at catching the fish. Now we must envision the crowd around Jesus, listening, and wondering what's happening here. Simon is looking at Jesus, maybe surprised at the request, tired and doubtful whether anything would come from this. His response to Jesus is, "Master/Rabbi, we've worked hard all

night, and haven't caught anything, but because You say so, I will let down the nets". Okay, let's see what happens next...

III. A huge catch, and nets about to break!

Despite being tired and perhaps in despair, Simon obediently moved the boat deeper into the water. We do not read anything about Jesus' preaching to the crowd anymore, but we see something else happening. Simon and his friends had such a large catch, that they needed both nets and both boats to carry the fish, and we see the boats so full they started to sink. What they witnessed was so miraculous, and overwhelming, that the only response Simon had, was to acknowledge his sinfulness as a human being, and at the same time acknowledging Jesus as his Lord. Bowing down, and calling Him Lord, this whole incident gives expression to Jesus as the Divine, with miraculous powers, as well as a message of hope and good news for the poor. The Divine entered his humble space of worry and concern and turned it into something extraordinary. Jesus encouraged him not to be afraid, but that he will from now on catch human beings, and so they pulled out their boats, left everything and followed Jesus.

IV. Fishermen turned disciples of the Living Christ

Our passage introduces us to the real-world feelings of human beings with their struggles to survive, the obstacles they encounter, and the moment when the Divine enters their space, and turns it upside down in a miraculous way. Simon who then was called Simon Peter, his fellow fishermen, and a few more would see their lives change dramatically as they left their ordinary lives to follow the extraordinary Christ our Lord. So, Christ does not only see their struggles, they are not only sinners, but He changed their life's direction into something different, deeper, filled with the purpose of God. Following Christ and becoming Apostles and creators of the early church, required from them to be courageous and leave behind their lives the way it was, and open themselves up for the Divine to enter, to disrupt, and to change direction for a purpose higher than what this world has to offer.

V. Conclusion

When God sees our struggles, God does not turn a blind eye, but enters our lives at moments we least expect it, wants our attention, a conversation, makes some requests, and gives us the opportunity to respond. Whatever we do, whatever work we are engaged in, whatever our daily

lives are like, our engagement in our church activities, we are constantly surrounded by the Divine presence, who sees our struggles, our questions for what is next. God wants to engage with us, and sometimes it feels scary, but in having the honor and privilege to be invited by Christ, to be engaged in life-changing events, is awesome. It does not always mean to leave one's home, or country, town, or career, but it means that God wants to be part of it in a fuller way. May this message be a reminder to us all to be open daily for an experience with Christ witnessing our struggles, with an extended hand to help, to guide and transform our lives. Amen.