

V Epiphany C 2022 (February 6)

Prelude (“Romanza” anonymous)

Welcome to our service for February 6, 2022, the Fifth Sunday After Epiphany. I’m Pastor Curtis Aguirre. Bob Park is the musician.

Let’s sing the hymn, “Oh, Sing to the Lord,” #822 in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship books. We will sing verses 1, 4, and 5.

1. Oh, sing to the Lord, oh, sing God a new song.
Oh, sing to the Lord, oh, sing God a new song.
Oh, sing to the Lord, oh, sing God a new song.
Oh, sing to the Lord, oh, sing to the Lord.

4. Oh, shout to our God, who gave us the Spirit.
Oh, shout to our God, who gave us the Spirit.
Oh, shout to our God, who gave us the Spirit.
Oh, sing to our God, oh, sing to our God.

5. For Jesus is Lord! Amen! Alleluia!
For Jesus is Lord! Amen! Alleluia!
For Jesus is Lord! Amen! Alleluia!
Oh, sing to our God, oh, sing to our God.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all... And also with you.

Let us pray.

Most holy God, the earth is filled with your glory, and before you angels and saints stand in awe. Enlarge our vision to see your power at work in the world, and by your grace make us heralds of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 24)

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Luke 5:1-11

The Gospel according to Luke, the 5th chapter..._Glory to you, O Lord!

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 signalled 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 are 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.

The Gospel of the Lord... Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

This Gospel text for today, and its parallels in Matthew and Mark, get me wondering what our mission is. What are we here for? What is our purpose, our mission as followers of Jesus?

This story of the amazing catch of fish and Jesus' words, that these fishermen would now be catching people, make it seem that our mission is to catch people, to bring them in. And, indeed, there are a few other passages that give the same impression.

For example, in Luke 14:15-24, Jesus tells the Parable of the Great Banquet, in which the main character invites guests to come to a great feast, but they all make excuses. The host finally sends his servants out telling them to compel people to come in off the streets, just to fill up the room.

In Luke 10, when Jesus is sending out the 70 disciples on their mission to teach and heal and cast out demons, we have the image of the 70 going out to harvest people—a kind of farm version of the fishing image of catching people. Jesus says to them:

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. (Luke 10:2)

So, we have people being caught like fish, being invited or compelled like guests, and being harvested like grain. I can see how we can get the idea that our main purpose is to go out and bring people in—maybe even against their wills. But is that really what Jesus was getting at?

What bothers me about our main purpose being the bringing in of people, is that it makes the Church essentially a self-serving organization whose main purpose it is to grow. It is a kind of cynical, hollow, and even imperial vision of what Jesus was about; and yet Jesus was anything but cynical, hollow, or imperial. It seems to me that he must have meant

something different. The urgency of his "sending out" and his "bringing in" must have been something other than just gaining followers.

I think to get at that "something other than", we have to look again at the content of Jesus' teaching and actions.

Jesus proclaimed that God is near, indeed, that God is among us and within us (Luke 17:21; I John 4:16). Jesus taught that God seeks out the lost, the rejected, and the ones whom the holy people and the powerful people of the day looked down on (Luke 4:16-21; 7:22-23). His actions were about restoring people to their communities, people who had been ostracized or rejected because of something they had done, or because of some disease or circumstance that had come upon them.

Jesus also tried to bridge the gap between the rich and powerful on the one hand, and the poor and powerless on the other. In the meal he shared with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the corrupt tax collector, Jesus got a "have" to share with the "have-nots" by returning everything that he (Zacchaeus) had taken dishonestly from them, and then some. Jesus' words at this miraculous change of heart were:

...today salvation has come to this house... for the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:9-10)

Here Zacchaeus was the lost: ostracized as a collaborator with the foreign occupier, exploiting his position of power to rip off ordinary people and make himself rich. But those whom Zacchaeus had exploited and ripped off were also in need of being saved from Zacchaeus and his rapacious ways. When God in Christ moved Zacchaeus' heart toward mercy, honesty, and the desire to make up for the ills he had done, the whole community was, in a sense, saved, and Zacchaeus was reconciled to those he had harmed.

Jesus was bringing people into something, but it was not an organization or a religion. Rather, Jesus was bringing people into restored relationships: a restored relationship to God and restored relationships to each other.

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The salvation or wholeness or shalom, that Jesus intended, seems to be this restoration of broken relationships.

Israel back then was torn apart by animosities, greed, exploitation, and rules made and enforced by powerful people for their own benefit—much as we see in our world today. This created a lot of outsiders, a large underclass, a lot of shunned people, and a lot of bad blood.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus' own experience growing up in Nazareth might have shaped his attitude toward the losers in all of these equations. I mean, he was born into a poor family, under questionable circumstances, possibly regarded as an illegitimate child, in a time when that would have been a badge of shame. He might have heard how people whispered about his mother (which really hurts when you're a kid). He may have lived first-hand what it means to be looked down on by people who think they're better than you are.

At any rate, Jesus was bringing people into community, into acceptance, back into relationship. He was also declaring that God does not shun or reject these people; rather, God looks for them and seeks them out.

So, when Peter and the other fishermen are sent to fish for people, it is not to make those people into card carrying members of an organization, but to restore them to God and to their communities; the same goes for the banquet scenario; the same goes for the harvest image.

What does that mean for us? We gather as a community of faith to be reminded of the Good News that God sends to us in Jesus. We want to learn from it, and I think, we want to be moved by it into action. God's salvation is not just about life after death, it is at least as much about living in shalom, in harmony, in balance, in whole relationships now, with God and with each other.

It seems to me, that our mission of gathering is not so much about bringing people into an organization, but rather about finding those places where people are divided from each other, and proclaiming

reconciliation, forgiveness, acceptance, and of embracing each other—in other words, to be matchmakers between people who don't like each other. Or, by the same token, where people are alienated from God, to act as matchmakers between them and God—to spread the love, so to speak.

I would also like to add that in our own time, this healing, this restoring, this salvation, is also between people and our planet—or, to be more precise, not so much *our* planet as the planet that God entrusted to us to be our home. Let's be honest, we are at odds with this planet. We fight and pillage and exploit it, and now we are beginning to get some push back from it.

There was a time when earth was big and we humans were small, but now we have become the dominant species on the planet with the capacity to wipe out life. Just as Jesus in his time said, “Repent, the Kingdom of God is here; it's not too late,” so we can proclaim the same message. It is not too late to be reconciled with God's gift, the earth; but it will mean that we must repent, turn around, change how we live and what we expect. That's what repentance means: to turn around, to change things, to make a new start.

Everything I have just reflected on in this sermon is summed up perfectly in II Corinthians, where it says:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the *ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the ministry of reconciliation to us. Thus, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God! (II Corinthians 5:18-20)

Or in Ephesians:

[God] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the

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fullness of time to *gather up all* things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

Or again in Colossians:

For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to *reconcile to himself all* things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

This is the net that God would have us cast; this is the banquet to bring people into; this is the harvest for which we are working. God give us the faith and strength to see it through. Amen.

Let's sing the hymn, "We All Are One in Mission," #576 in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship books.

1. We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.
A single great commission compels us from above
to plan and work together that all may know God's love.

2. We all are called for service, to witness to God's name.
Our ministries are diff'rent; our purpose is the same:
to touch the lives of others, with God's surprising grace,
so ev'ry folk and nation may feel God's warm embrace.

3. Now let us be united, and let our song be heard.
Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word.
We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.

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Let us confess our faith using the words of the Apostle's Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Giving thanks for the light of Christ that shines in the midst of the world's darkness, let us pray for all people according to their needs. I will end each petition with the words, "Lord, in your mercy." Please respond by saying, "Hear our prayer."

(Brief silence)

Most Holy God, your light springs forth like the dawn. Call your Church to share the mystery of your grace with a broken and searching world. Lord, in your mercy:

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C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, your gracious provision is embodied in the abundance of your creation. Enlighten us to care for your earth and all your creatures and to use your gifts for good. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, you offer your wisdom and guidance to all who serve in government. We pray for our Premier, John Horgan, as he recovers from cancer treatment, and for the Lieutenant Governor, Janet Austin. We pray for our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, in this time of pandemic, global uncertainty, and the danger of war in Europe; and we pray for the Governor General, Mary Simon. And on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the accession day of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, we pray for our Head of State and give thanks for the stability she has provided over these many years. Give to all of them your wisdom and guidance. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, give your light to this gathering of faith. We pray for our congregation as we begin the transition from one pastorate to the next. Be with our Council and those who will form the Call Committee; and be with us all as we take on new and different tasks. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, we pray for all who are ill or suffering in any way and name them now before you...

(Long silence)

For all these, Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, remembering all those who bore persecution and death for their faith in you, we seek your courage and strength to confess Christ boldly, and we look forward to being united with all the saints around your glorious throne. Lord, in your mercy:

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C: Hear our prayer.

Most Holy God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who has made his dwelling among us, your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.**

It is our custom here at Our Redeemer Lutheran to acknowledge birthdays and anniversaries on the first Sunday of the month. If you have a birthday or anniversary this month, we offer you this blessing.

**Many, many blessings,
Many, many blessings,
God grant you abundant blessings! (repeat)
Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
Bless you now and ever,
Grant eternal blessings!**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour (+) and give you peace. Amen.

Postlude ("Españoleta" by Gaspar Sanz)