



The Great Catch-UP! Touchpoint for February 6, 2019

Luke 5:1-11 [NRSV] Jesus Calls the First Disciples

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.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" ... "Be not afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

I promise you. I will get to the passage.

I was reading a book recently that talked about the word for the Divine in Aramaic. And the author contrasted it with the word for the Divine in English. According to him, the word in Aramaic, "Alaha" has as its essence a sense of *oneness-unity*. One might even say a sense of *healing* and *wholeness*. It isn't just a singular unity as in an isolated *oneness*, but a unity of the *plural* – a unity of all.

And the author contrasted that with the word for the Divine in English which is the word *God*. And the word *God* comes from the German word *good*. So the essence of the Divine in this case is *goodness*. Now this sent my mind in a thousand different directions, and you're going to get a couple of those right now. And they might even apply to this Bible passage.

The difference between *unity* and *goodness* are profound, especially as it applies to *sin*, and our approach to it. If the essence of the Divine is *unity*, then sin is separation, brokenness, dis-memberment. And the approach to it is to heal it, bring it back together, re-unite it, re-member it.

If the essence of the Divine is *good*, then sin is *bad*. And the approach to it is to avoid it. The approach is to separate oneself from it. This is of course, after we have judged it as being bad, after we have separated ourselves from it, stood over and against it and judged it as *good* or *evil*. Which by the way, is the original sin in the garden of Eden, thinking we can be the judge over good and evil and thinking the goal is the separation of the two.

If the Divine essence is *goodness*, then *separation* and *avoidance* are the operative words in our approach to discipleship and becoming godly. The two—good and bad, good and evil—can never meet, touch, encounter the other. There must be a separation, an eternal separation, maybe even a fiery eternal separation.

Separation and *avoidance* are the operative words in our approach to discipleship and becoming godly, if our definition of the Divine is *goodness*. But *separation* and *avoidance* are exactly what *sin* is, if the essence of the Divine is *unity*! If, the essence of the Divine is *unity, wholeness, healing*—then *separation* and *avoidance* can never be the operative words in our discipleship

Now how does this apply to the bible passage for today? Well, Peter turns to Jesus and says, “Depart from me. I am a sinner.” In other words, “Separate yourself from me, Jesus, stay pure, stay good.” And Jesus pays no attention. He doesn’t even pronounce forgiveness on Peter. He basically ignores his request. His reply is, “Do not be afraid. Come, let’s catch other people.” In other words, “No, Peter, I am going to use you as you are. Do not be afraid of your brokenness. I am going to use your sin to connect with others.”

Again, *sin* not as *bad, naughty* things we do, but *sin* as *brokenness*. The Divine isn’t Santa Claus trying to figure out who has been *naughty or nice or good or bad*, so we should be *good for goodness sake*. Jesus is saying, “I am going to use your sin, your brokenness to unite with others and me. Separation and avoidance are not my calling nor my goal. Unity is.”

The invitation is to throw out the nets of Christ’s love and grace into the chaos and brokenness of the world. Not to avoid the chaos, not to separate one from it, but to embrace it and bring unity to it.

The invitation is to *catch people up* in the grace and mercy of the Divine. *Catch people up* in the healing of the Mystery. *Catch people up* in the unity of all, instead of having them feel separate and isolated. The Divine is a net of grace seeking to *catch* all and unite all in it. And that can be done through the brokenness of the world, not through the avoidance of it.

Think of AA, and how they introduce themselves at a meeting. The first things out of their mouths is, and I’ll use my name in the example, “Hi, I’m Jim, and I’m an alcoholic.” That is their point of connection. That is their point of grace. That is the foundation of their unity and the power for their healing. They don’t avoid their brokenness. They admit it. Confront it. Even embrace it. And from there, they *catch* others up in the healing it offers.

The invitation is to throw out the nets of Christ’s love and grace into the chaos and brokenness of the world. Not to avoid the chaos, not to separate one from it. But to embrace it and bring unity to it. Now all this is easier said than done.

I was reminded of this the other day when a friend came up to me and said, “I’m sorry I missed last week on Wednesday. I had pink eye.” He then went on to say he got it from feeding the homeless at someplace in downtown Phoenix. He mentioned the name and asked if I had heard of it. I said, “No” and he began to describe it. He said it was a space, a kind of village carved out for the homeless. But it was such a dangerous place that most of the homeless don’t go inside but simply live outside the fences and only go in for the food at meal time. He said it reeks of urine and feces and it’s a place unlike any other. And then he added, “You really should go down there some time.”

Now the first thing that popped into my mind was to scream, “You’ve got to be kidding! Why would I want to do that?! I have the perfect life. I am a hermit, at a retreat center, in Carefree, Arizona. I have removed myself, separated myself from the crap of this world. I live in a place of *goodness*. This is a *holy place*. But apparently, my understanding of what is *holy* and *good* is all wrong. It is not about separation, but healing, uniting. If this place is to be a *holy place*, then it must be a place that encounters and embraces the brokenness of the world, and unites with it in order to transform it.

I think of those I know who have experienced addiction and illness, self-doubt and deep despair. And they have all told me, that it was in the depths of the despair that they encountered Mystery's grace, Divine healing. It was not after they got their act together, after they had separated themselves from their brokenness, their sin, that they first encountered grace and mercy. No, it was in the midst of it and in their darkest time.

In our passage for today, Jesus asks the men to throw their nets *into the deep* water. By using these words, Luke is conjuring up the image from Genesis 1 where God's spirit moves over the *chaos of the deep* water. Again, the image is of the divine that does not separate itself from the chaos and brokenness of the world but dives into the depth of it. Uniting itself with it, not separating itself from it. An active, deliberate act of unity. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." "And his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means "God with us." "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." "Christ is all and in all." "He (Christ) became sin." "The Lord breathed His breath into the mud and it became human." These are the deliberate acts of the Divine to unite with all that is.

Separation of *good* from *bad* is not the end goal. The divine does not separate itself from the chaos and brokenness of the world but dives into the depth of it. The Divine is a net of grace seeking to catch all and unite all in it.

Look, if the essence of the Divine is separation of *good* from *bad*, then it makes no sense for Jesus to say that the "Tax collectors and crack whores will enter the kingdom of heaven ahead of us." But if the essence of the Mystery is unity, then Jesus has no other option but to speak those words in all their shocking bluntness.

Think of this meal. In the night Jesus is betrayed, he sits with the one who will betray him, the one who will deny him. He sits with the doubter and the cowards who will run away from him. And he chooses not to separate himself from them, but unite himself to them. Their sin, their brokenness is not a hindrance. In fact, he becomes broken himself. He meets them in their brokenness. It becomes their point of unity.

"The body of Christ, broken for you." This meal is where brokenness meets brokenness. At the heart of the Mystery is unity, not separation. Unity with you, here and now. And at all times and in all places.

The Divine is a net of grace seeking to catch all and unite all in it. Now that's a net worth getting caught up in, and catching others up in as well.

Amen.