



## Unity, not Separation – Touchpoint for February 2, 2022

**Luke 5:1-11 (MSG)** <sup>1-3</sup> Once when he was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.

<sup>4</sup> When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch." <sup>5-7</sup> Simon said, "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets." It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.

<sup>8-10</sup> Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. "Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself." When they pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee's sons, coworkers with Simon.

<sup>10-11</sup> Jesus said to Simon, "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed him.

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

*"Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself."*

Peter is both right and wrong at the same time.

"I'm a sinner" ... Correctomundo Peter!

"Leave me to myself" ... Couldn't be more wrong on that one.

Before we begin to talk about this text, we have to come to some definition of what 'sin' is. And to get at what sin is, we first have to come up with some definition of God. Because 'sin,' at a very simplistic level, is the opposite of how we think about God. And yes, I realize, St. Paul says in II Corinthians that "Christ became sin." But that's a whole other touchpoint.

So let's talk about God.

I once read a book by Neil Douglas-Klotz entitled "The Hidden Gospel." In it he talked about the word for the Divine in Aramaic and 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 the difference between 'unity' and 'goodness' is 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.

This is at the foundation of Peter's words:

*"Master, leave. I'm a sinner."*

But if the essence of the Divine is 'unity,' then 'separation' and 'avoidance' are exactly what 'sin' is. If the essence of the Divine is 'unity,' 'wholeness,' 'healing' ... then 'separation' and 'avoidance' can never be the operative words in our discipleship. Nor can they be the operative words for Jesus ministry.

And they can never be the final words of God.

**For eternal separation is an eternal failure for a God of wholeness, of unity.**

And so, this is why Jesus pays no attention to Peter's words. He doesn't even pronounce forgiveness on Peter. He basically ignores his request. Peter doesn't even need to be forgiven before he starts his discipleship.

His reply is, "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." 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 brokenness to connect with others. I am going to use your brokenness to unite with others and me. Separation and avoidance are not my calling nor my goal. Unity is."

Jesus understands God as one who "makes whole," not one "who separates."

So from Jesus' perspective, Peter's statement of "*Master, leave. I'm a sinner,*" makes as much sense as you or I saying:

"Stay away from me doctor, for I am sick."

"Stay away from me chef, for I am hungry."

"Stay away from me vaccine, for I live in a country with Covid."

Look, if the essence of the Divine is separation of 'good' from 'bad,' then it makes no sense for Jesus to invite Peter into discipleship. He is after all, a sinful man,

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, healing and restoration (which is what the word 'salvation' means), then Jesus has no other option but to speak those words in all their shocking bluntness.

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.

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 only be done through the embracing of the brokenness of the world, not through the avoidance of it.

Imagine AA saying to someone, “You can’t come in here because you’re an alcoholic.” Instead, think of AA, and how they introduce themselves at a meeting. The first thing 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.

Way too often the church and we Christians have agreed with Peter more than Jesus about who God is and what God is about. We have told many people that God doesn’t want anything to do with them because they are sinners.

What a joke!

How does that fit with our passage for today? Or the whole story of the life of Jesus?

We have got to stop thinking of the Divine as a “Judge” and start thinking of the Divine as a “Physician,” a “Healer.”

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, that they first encountered grace and mercy. No, it was in the midst of it and in their darkest time.

Think of the cross, if that isn't uniting yourself with all that is broken, I don't know what is.

And finally, 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,” to quote my dear friend, Henry Rojas.

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.**

## *Spirit in the Desert*

### Opening Songs

#### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

#### **Creator Spirit, Come**

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.

Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.

Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

#### **Come O Lord and Set Us Free**

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

### **The Meal**

#### **Lord's Prayer**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

### **Benediction**

#### **A Blessing**

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.