

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • FEBRUARY 10, 2019

Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 138

We give thanks with our whole hearts,
**not with empty prayers that sound profound
or with false humility, or pride, or pretend faith.**

We give thanks because when we called,
you answered in your own way and time, increasing our strength.

**Though the Lord is high and lifted up,
every lowly one is held in God's heart.**

Let us pray:

**We bow toward your holiness and give thanks
for your faithfulness. On the day I call,
you preserve me, you stretch out your hand
in your steadfast love. Amen.**

The Scripture

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.

The Message
A Little Distance
(Retreat for the Sake of Community)
Terry Overfelt

Big Love: Retreating a little distance from our physical existence makes room for us to connect with holiness that will send us out again repentant and redeemed for the sake of the world.

This week I dreamed I was walking with two of you through a woods of really tall pines. It was dusk. One of you was running laps around us, and we were marveling at your energy and commitment to get more out of this walk than our pace allowed.

It surprised me, as night began to settle in, just how pitch-dark the woods became. I felt uneasy because, I knew the path had led us almost to a bridge. It spanned over a canyon, and if we stepped to one side or the other, we would fall off the cliff.

So, I began to crawl, keeping my weight centered back in my knees, as I reached forward with my hands. I knew we were on the path, because of the smooth ground and stones. At last, in complete darkness, my hands felt a metal grate that I knew must connect the ground to the wooden bridge. I could feel the cool ridges and the center peak that wrapped in an upward slope to the flat bridge surface. Then I woke up.

The Interpretation to Retreat

So, I am wondering if this dream is a manifestation of retreating in community. My companions and I are getting ready to get onto a mysterious bridge, but although blinding darkness has set in, we are determined to get there even if we must crawl. Retreating is moving from physical living to a bridge of spiritual awareness.

In separation, meditation, and prayer, we are reaching and held breathless and breathing with just the right mix of self, community, and holiness.

I want to get a little distance from the demands in our lives. I want us to hear Jesus affirm some of both his and my hopes.

On the bridge, I can pay attention to what God has to say in the stillness of listening silence, even if it is nothing at all. Here we can empty ourselves of tall pines distractions, in order to invite the sacred to move in.

Jesus Retreats

In today's Scripture, Jesus is getting *a little distance* himself. Jesus is good at retreat. You would think that if anyone *doesn't* need to get away to listen and lay in the lap of God, it would be God's self in Christ. Then again, we all know what it feels like to be so caught up in life's demands that we can't even hear ourselves think or get in touch with our feelings because we are on our way to the next set of demands.

We see even Jesus, stealing away, setting himself apart to reorient. He goes to deserts, mountaintops, seaside, gardens, and boats to be in the presence of God.

So, in today's story, he is backing toward the shore of Lake Gennesaret at the Galilean Sea. The crowd is pressing in on him with their cries and amazement to hear this man speak and be the word of God.

Fishers of People

In today's story, Jesus begins gathering up the community of his disciples as famous, "Fishers of People." The direct translation is a little different. Fishing means to reach. Rather than hook, net, and snare, it means finding, a gentler sort of gathering in.

The ones that Jesus is setting Peter up to "catch" are the likes of Peter, who knows himself to be a sinner. Takes one to know one?

Let's look back in the story.

Peter and Jesus

Peter knows Jesus before this day. He's looked for and listened to Jesus and even had him to his house. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus is approaching the lake bank, and the crowd is pressing in on him to hear the truth of God and have some healings of their own, no doubt.

Jesus checks in the press and sees two boats. Jesus calls to Peter and gets into his boat.

Peter, James, and John had a terrible fishing night; caught nothing. Peter is washing his net when Jesus asks him to push out a little way from the shore. Jesus gets *a little distance* out from the shore. This is a move Jesus has made before. It just might keep his hem intact from the garment reachers. Out on the water, his voice projects better. In the boat, Jesus is able to sit down. After Jesus finishes his teaching, he wants some time with Peter at *a little distance* from the earshot of the crowd.

He tells Simon Peter to row out farther, into the deep water, and "drop your nets for a

catch.”

Simon Peter, calling Jesus “Master,” gets a bit snarky. “Jesus, we worked hard all night and didn’t catch a thing. But because you say so, I’ll drop the net.”

The Catch and Release (of Sin)

Well, they caught so many fish the nets were splitting. James and John grabbed their nets and rowed the second boat out to help. Both boats were filled with fish to the brink of sinking. Peter was in such awe that he fell at Jesus’ knees saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Simon Peter, now calling Jesus “Lord,” gets *more than a bit* repentant. This seems a strange reaction. You just hit the worldly jackpot with Jesus, and you think how sinful you are?

Somewhere amidst our will to catch fish and our net washing surrender, comes Jesus into our boat. Being in the same boat with Jesus will do this; bring to mind our worldly short-comings with the One, who is already fully aware and has a plan for us even though and even so. In this moment, Jesus tells Peter, “Do not be afraid.”

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus saw willful Peter’s demand that Jesus, “Go away,” as Peter’s fear? Then Jesus is comment-less on his confession of sin, counters his fear and lays out a new plan. He continues the metaphor that gets Peter’s attention: abundant fish, and more fishing, but this time a gathering in of people.

Because Jesus and Peter had both gone out *a little distance*, Peter saw and heard the holy call on his life. In the presence of Jesus, he is self-convicted of his sinfulness and perceived unworthiness to keep company with this holiness. But he couldn’t be more wrong. Right away, Jesus invites Peter to gather in the people that they can’t yet see in a sea filled with the likes of us, who are just swimming in sinful, exhausting circles without awareness that we can breathe, if we go out deeper to find the abundance that the living God is calling us to.

Sinners

God **is** going to meet us where **we are**, even in our willfulness and sinfulness, because... **all are** sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

It is our human nature. The prophet Isaiah (57:20) likens sin to the tossing of the sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. The sea does not need to do anything special to produce mire and dirt. That is the result of its natural motions. That is also true of us, as our sinful natures reveal themselves. The natural motions of our lives produce mire and dirt. No special effort is needed.

Richard Foster (*Celebration of Discipline* p.4) says whatever our sin – anger, bitterness, gluttony, pride, sexual lust, alcohol, fear – we determine to never do it again, but we don't have a strong enough will to do this alone. If we think we do, we are entering into the arrogance of "will worship." When we know ourselves to be powerless, we turn to our higher power. Amen!

Back to the Bridge

This is how I feel in my dream, crawling toward the bridge. Foster suggests that the chasm on the right is our will to be free from sin that can never succeed by our power alone. The chasm to the left of the bridge is our apathy to not even try, since we can't manage it anyway.

The bridge over both our physical will and apathy is God. God is working the better half of our duality: our spirituality, inside of us. God's is the inside job!

It is God who bridges over our will and apathy to land us in holy affirmation of Big Love. Only God can do this as we get a little distance from our lives and turn determinedly toward God.

Even if you must crawl in the forested darkness, go the distance, get to the bridge. On the bridge, we will find God, who will:

- Speak to our inner being
- Get our attention where we are
- Draw out our awareness and repentance from sin
- Dispel our fear
- Restore our courage
- Send us out righteous in sacred blamelessness for the sake of the world.

It is not only to save us at the end of our lives, but to save us in the midst of living. We must get out *a little distance* away from the darkness of human strivings, so that we can hear.

The bridge we are standing on, or crawling to retreat upon, is where God meets us, longing for connection with us from the path of the earth to the peace of heavenly presence.

Coming Ashore

When the boat loads of fish and the fishermen come into shore, the crowd must be going wild. Yet to Peter, James, and John, the success of this amazing catch is upstaged by awe. They walk away from this unimaginable catch to fish another way.

The community crowd on the shore is fed with more than enough. Jesus says, "Follow me."

The response is, "I will go Lord, if you need me. I will hold your people..." In my net, I mean my heart.

Amen. Amen.