

## Life's Abundance

(Luke 5:1-11)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 10, 2019

In the name of the one God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

As I read the passage from Luke's gospel this week, there was one word to which I returned time and again, a word that was like a lighthouse lantern illuminating the darkness: *abundance*. There is ***real, powerful*** abundance found throughout these 11 verses, and as I thought about it I was led to place it in three sorts of categories.

First, there is the ***abundance of presence***. It begins with the abundant crowd and those "pressing in"<sup>1</sup> on Jesus at the water's edge. Time and again we read of crowds following Jesus: crowds walking with and behind him on the roads; crowds gathered on hillsides and in villages to be in his presence; crowds clamoring for his words and his healing. And here, a crowd has gathered once again to "hear the word of God."<sup>2</sup> They have found him; they are present for Jesus (and, to look at it in a slightly different way, they have ***presented themselves*** to him).

But the abundant presence is also that of ***Jesus himself***. God is not distant or removed from the people of Israel; God is no longer just found in the holy of holies at the Jerusalem Temple. God is ***there, on that day***, in the form of the incarnate Son. The magnificence of God ... the overwhelming, transcendent power of the Creator ... surrounds and envelops the crowd even as it is ***among*** them. God is present for the crowd.

The second type of abundance I find in this passage is the ***abundance of gifts***. The miraculous catch of fish that Peter, James and John take in is incredible ... a catch so large "that their nets were beginning to break,"<sup>3</sup> a haul so tremendous that it began to sink two of the fishing boats. It was certainly enough that it would provide for the fishermen and their families and would feed many in the village and surrounding area. In a moment when the need was great ... in a place where the result of a day's work was ***nothing*** ... there was abundance.

And again, we find this abundance ... the abundance of gifts ... in the presence of Jesus himself. Peter and the others had worked all night in the boats, casting their nets time and again into the water and catching nothing. I do not doubt that they were tired, and frustrated ... and perhaps even worried over what the absence of a catch meant for their livelihoods. Yet here was Jesus, encouraging them to try just once more. The abundant gifts here were the encouragement of Jesus ... and his support ... and his willingness to demonstrate that through God ***all things*** are possible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:1 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 5:6 (NRSV).

And finally, there is an ***abundance of grace***. Look again at the reaction of Peter when he witnesses this miracle from Jesus: “[H]e fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”<sup>4</sup> Peter recognized the power in the one sitting next to him in the boat and in that instant recognized and proclaimed his own shortcomings as a flawed child of God. And how did Jesus react? There was no chastising of this fisherman. There was no response of “Yes, as a matter of fact, you are.”

No, Jesus responded with abundant grace ... and told him that there was something greater Peter would do. The fish he would catch would be humanity. Instead of turning his back on this man because of his sin, Jesus instead invited him to follow him.

How often might we stop to consider the presence of this abundance ... the abundance of presence, and gifts, and grace ... in our own lives? In those moments when we may be tired, it is often difficult to find the strength try one more time. When our work never seems enough, or we do not achieve the goals for which we are aiming, or our own sin seems to be so much that the reward of grace is the last thing we would expect, abundance is likely the last thing on our minds.

Taking that next step may seem like one step too far; accepting the challenge to try one more time may be a risk we are not courageous enough to take. None of us want to fail. None of us want the nets and boats of our lives to pull apart or sink beneath the waves. But if we are to discover the joyful abundance of God, “[L]ike the disciples, we also have to throw our nets out into the deep waters.”<sup>5</sup>

How do we do that? First, acknowledge the presence of God in the world ... of Jesus in our lives. In the time of the ministry of Paul, the basic creed of faith was three words: *Jesus is Lord*. Simply saying that is a direct way of opening ourselves up to the knowledge of God’s presence.

Next, acknowledge the gifts in our lives. They do not have to be large or overwhelming. Often, a gift can be a call from a friend ... or a hug ... or even a smile from someone walking past. When you begin to reflect on those, you will discover the abundance of the gifts God places in our path.

Finally, acknowledge the grace of God and be ***certain*** of the fact that we are worthy of receiving it. The dark moments of doubt and uncertainty in our lives ... our own struggles with sin ... may veil that reality. But grace is the summative moment; through the acknowledgement of God’s presence and reflecting on the gifts in each day, we will know that we have been granted grace.

So how do we say “thank you” ... for the presence, for the gifts, for God’s grace? I think we can say “thank you” with what we choose to do with the abundance ... with how we share it with

---

<sup>4</sup> Luke 5:8 (NRSV).

<sup>5</sup> Pamela Cooper White, “Luke 5:1-11: Pastoral Perspective.” *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Vol. 1* (Kindle edition).

the world. But there is something else, something simple but wonderful in its own way: we show our joy. For in the words of Karl Barth, “Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.”<sup>6</sup>

Amen.

---

<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, via Quodid. <http://quodid.com/quotes/1816/karl-barth/joy-is-the-simplest-form-of-gratitude>