

January 1, 2017
Luke 5:1-11
Pastor Elizabeth Kelsey
Creekside COB

“Information or Transformation?”

A month ago I completed a six-week course called “Making 4 hours count.” The aim of that course for pastors was how to study the Bible in preparation for writing a sermon. Studying scripture goes a step beyond reading. I don’t remember taking a course on Bible study as focused and compelling as this one -- and it feels important to share. One student’s seminary dissertation on “Engaging with Scripture” notes four foundational focuses of biblical study.¹ First, it is meant to transform us. Second, it is meant to be taken as a whole. Third, it acknowledges God’s authority. And fourth, it shows us how God’s story and our story interconnect.

The class I took made Bible study exciting. We concentrated on Luke 5:1-11 about Jesus calling his disciples. The four hours not only taught me how to creatively engage with the story, identify questions it raised, use appropriate resources, and discover how its message coincides with my needs and experiences.

Our first assignment was to collect a number of resources in one place. My resources were spread out on several bookshelves around the house. My desktop now includes three or four versions of the Bible, an atlas of Bible lands, and a Bible dictionary. A set of commentaries by William Barclay is within reach. By the way, you have access to all of these resources in the church library, including the Barclay commentaries! Check the top shelf of the library bookshelves. Other more scholarly commentaries are available online.

¹ Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, *The pastor as vital link: a study in how seminary-educated pastors engender engagement with scripture in select congregations*, an abstract.

This kind of Bible study is doable for anyone. I am sharing this with you this morning because people who believe in scripture should not just read it but also study it. I decided it is worth a Sunday morning sermon to introduce one method of study. Don't be frightened by the idea of "four hours." They aren't meant to be done in one sitting. Take one hour at a time, and spread them out over a week or two.

HOUR 1 – Getting into the story

The purpose of the first hour is to immerse yourself in the story -- use your senses to feel and see and hear and practice. This is the step I enjoyed most. I would suggest for each hour you begin by lighting a candle and asking God for illumination. If you are willing to do this study with me, read Luke 5:1-11 in several translations. If you can, print out the scripture and underline all the verbs. (You can go to www.biblegateway.com and print out any version you like.) Highlight the verbs that create a picture or action in your mind. What is the emphasis of the story? Next, think of a creative way to get into the story. Draw a scene that stands out to you. Pretend you just experienced this exciting, incredible story and you are telling it to a friend. Be dramatic! There are scads of ways to be creative--find one you are comfortable with. At the end of the hour, jot down a few notes for the next time.

HOUR 2 – Asking questions

Do a quick mental review of what you already know about the story. What questions do you still have as you read Luke 5:1-11? Are there words or places or actions or "why" questions you need to look up in the Bible dictionary? Jot them down. Check the Bible atlas for the location of the seas and towns mentioned. The Wikipedia website is a good resource for a quick summary of almost anything. It is important to compare to fishing stories in Matthew and Mark. How do they handle the call of Jesus? What does Luke include that the other gospels don't? Take a few minutes to jot down what you learned and what you still need to know. Hold those for the next hour.

HOUR 3 – Digging deeper

Hour 3 is more in depth, looking at context and background. This is a good time to use commentaries or online resources if you have a computer. Review what you still have questions about. How does

this story fit into the larger Biblical story -- does it remind you of other biblical texts? Are you curious about the authorship of Luke, or what sources Luke used for his gospel? If you have a study Bible there may be information in the front or back of the book, or separate introductions at the beginning of each gospel. Don't get caught up in scholarly differences of opinion -- it's enough to know there are many theories about the authorship and date the book was written. In the last few minutes, review your notes and summarize what you learned.

HOUR 4 – Seeking transformation

In the end, Bible study is for transformation, not just information. This is the time to look at the passage from a personal perspective. How does this story dovetail with my own experience? What is the challenge for me? One of my favorite quotes is from Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian in the 19th century. He says, “We don't go to the mirror to examine the mirror; we go to the mirror to examine ourselves in the mirror.” Likewise, we don't go to the Bible just to examine the Bible; we go to the Bible to examine ourselves.

That's the framework for studying scripture the class was introduced to. Let me share how the study went for me.

HOUR 1 – Getting into the story

My creative hour began by reading the story aloud in four versions. In order to keep my mind focused, I read it while pacing the house to keep my mind focused. Using my senses -- feeling, seeing, hearing -- helped me get into the story. I looked at verbs that caught my attention. I am no artist, but I drew simple pictures of each scene. I told the story dramatically as though I were sharing an exciting event that just happened.

These are pictures that came to mind as I read:

- I could feel the crowds pressing against Jesus, backing him up to the water, making it necessary to teach from Peter's boat.**
- I was impressed by the hunger of the crowds to hear what Jesus had to say.**
- I was surprised that the disciples obeyed Jesus' instructions to “push off” and “let down” the net, considering that their recent fishing effort was futile and they had just cleaned their nets.**

- I was amazed that when Jesus told Peter to cast the net back into the lake, strong-willed, independent Simon would tell Jesus, “OK, if you say so.”
- Why did express such guilt and fear at Jesus’ display of power? It seems a bit excessive.
- I was struck by Jesus’s response when Peter acknowledged his sinfulness. He said “Don’t be afraid” rather than “I forgive you.” Jesus recognized the real emotion behind what Peter said.
- The words “catching” and “releasing” intrigued me. What have we caught that needs to be released?

HOOR 2 – Asking questions

I underlined anything I had questions about and looked them up in my resources.

- **Setting** – This story appears in all four gospels, yet the setting of varies from gospel to gospel. Only in Luke was it preceded by Jesus being thrown out of Nazareth and by Jesus healing Peter’s mother.
- **Lake Gennessaret** – we know it as the Sea of Galilee, but because Gennessaret and Tiberius were important towns on the west side of the lake, some referred to it that way.
- **Miraculous catch of fish** – William Barclay says that miracles require three things: eyes to see the possibility, a spirit that makes the effort, and the willingness to do what seems hopeless.²
- **“Crowds were pressing in”** – Why “pressing in”? Was this a mob mentality? A curiosity about Jesus? Was it just a space too small for a large crowd? Or was it their eagerness to learn from a great teacher?
- **“Let down your nets into the catch of fish.”** Note that the fish were already there!
- **“Get away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.”** The Message says, “I can’t handle this holiness.” It’s much the same reaction to God’s holiness that Moses felt at the burning bush and Isaiah experienced at his call.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*; translated with an introduction and interpretation. Westminster Press, 1956.

- **“From now on you will be catching people. “ The Greek word *zogron* used here is commonly used for trapping, or capturing alive.**
- **“Releasing everything, they followed him.” There is a shift in priorities here -- from full-time owner of a fishing business to a full-time follower of Jesus. It was a clear choice, not half-hearted.**

HOOR 3 Further research

I had three questions I still wanted to pursue in this hour:

Why did Peter react with such guilt or shame at the massive catch of fish?

- **I checked Matthew and Mark. Both of them separate the stories of Jesus’ teaching from the boat from the story of Jesus calling his disciples. Neither of them include the miracle catch. And in the context of their gospel stories, there appears no reason for Simon to feel guilty or fearful and want Jesus to go away.**
- **John, on the other hand, includes the miracle catch as part of the post-resurrection story. Peter’s response there seems appropriate. He denied Jesus three times and had a reason to feel guilty. Jesus asked him three times, “Do you love me?”**
- **Luke used two major sources for writing his gospel -- the gospel of Mark, and an ancient source known as “Q.” He probably used a source called “L” as well -- for Luke’s own version!**
- **When we care more about transformation than information, the discrepancies in the stories don’t really matter. The ultimate point for us is the bold decision to leave our pursuits and follow Jesus.**

What did Jesus mean by telling Peter, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people?” For a fisherman, the idea of fishing is to sell them for food. So how does that compare to catching people? The literal translation is “You shall be capturing people alive.” SermonWriter says “Jesus’ disciples will be inviting people into the kingdom of God, where they will become free from the things that had bound them.”

How in the world could the disciples just abruptly leave their occupation and livelihood to follow Jesus? What happened to their

equipment? What happened to that load of fish? Were they responding to the miracle, or were they truly changed on the inside? I'm looking at it in practical terms, of course. I'm not sure I have ever dared to be impractical in my walk with God. Aren't we to use common sense? Or does our faith in God call us to take risks beyond our comfort zone?

HOOR 4 Seeking transformation

Following up from that last question, my thoughts turned to our study on *Outrageous and Courageous*. I don't know about you, but that study challenged me to take a risk. Will I? How do we move from "fishing for fish" to "bringing "live" people into the kingdom of God? Like the disciples who put down their nets into the catch of fish already there, our neighbors in Stonegate and Ashton Pines are already close by. The disciples' response to leave all and follow is a risky and scary step. But we aren't even called to leave home. We are simply asked to invite and listen and offer friendship.

Here's a crucial question we need to answer for ourselves. How convinced am I that Jesus loves me and that knowing Jesus is life-giving? We aren't all conversationalists. But we can all smile and shake hands and perhaps offer a small gift with a letter of introduction to our church. We can make it possible for bicyclers and walkers to use our property and invite them to use our prayer garden and playground. If you saw the list of ideas from the small groups, we've got ideas to last a lifetime, but our energy needs to focus on a few doable ideas at a time. Like the disciples, we need to respond to the call. When we share the good news with our neighbors it isn't like Christians are superior -- it isn't an "us" and "them" thing. We are all God's children. It's more like sharing and encouraging each other on our life journeys. May we seek to understand and experience more of God's life-giving love, and may God grant us courage to follow God's call.

I hope this study method has whet your whistle for digging into Bible study. It actually fits well for a New Year's message. Hour 4 challenges us to respond. What better resolution can we make than to release whatever muddies our focus on God? Can we move beyond what is comfortable and practical, and respond to Jesus' invitation, "Come follow me"? Happy New Year! May you be blessed!