

# Reflection| What do we say YES to, when we say Yes to God/Faith/Jesus/Church?

Sunday, February 6, 2022 | Knox-Metropolitan United Church | Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#) | [Luke 5:1-11](#) | Cameron Fraser

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Deciding what to call this

The time of speaking that follows the readings

Is a live question amongst churches

Do we call this a sermon?

A Homily?

A Teaching?

A Theme Discussion?

Personally, as our bulletin might suggest, I like “reflection”.

By this I mean that rather than seeking to extrapolate from the text the definitive

Meaning or lesson for all people

I hope that this time opens up space that each of us might reflect on what meaning

Personal and collective

There might be in the text of the day

That might inform how we move in the world, in our own lives

How we navigate the circumstances we face

Recognizing that many of these are shared and common

But we approach them from our own contexts

Bringing all we carry

And these days, we carry a lot!

So, this morning we hear this passage

From Luke’s telling of the Jesus story

In which Jesus invites a crew of fishers

To leave their boat and nets

And come and follow him

And then he offers a similar invitation to a tax collector

The fishers

And the tax collector

Say yes!

You can read it here:

<https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=511151669>

This moment is also relayed in the Gospel of Mark

<https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=511151490>

And the Gospel of Matthew

<https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=511151405>

Now it's generally agreed that Mark is written first and that Matthew and Luke are written using Mark as source material. There are many sections in the latter two which read almost word for word from the first.

It is also assumed that both Matthew and Luke are written using a second common source or second set of common sources, likely a compilation of Jesus' teaching and preaching.

And finally, it is assumed that both Matthew and Luke draw on different sources, unique to each one of the communities from which those texts appear.

When one reads the three versions of this episode one notices some things.

The part about Levi, the tax collector is pretty much identical in all three, although they all put it in slightly different parts of the story, and in Matthew, Levi is called by the name Matthew, and in Mark, it is specifically noted that Levi's table is set up by the sea, which is important, stay tuned!

Now in Matthew and Mark, the first part, the calling of the fishing crew is also pretty much identical.

All of this is to be expected.

But in Luke, this part goes down very different.

In the other two, this one crew of Simon Peter, James and John, are actually two groups, who are encountered separately.

Jesus is walking along the sea shore

Peter and his brother are mending nets

Jesus invites them to follow him

They say yes.

They continue along and the same offer, with the same response is made to James and John

But in Luke as we heard read this morning,

They are part of the same crew

Jesus comes and sits in their boat, asking Simon to take him out in the water

And he teaches the crowd at the sea shore

What is he teaching?

Well, we can likely assume that he is speaking about Jubilee

The Jewish concept of redistributive wealth, land management, and nonviolent conflict resolution

Why?

Well, that's what he's been teaching about previously in the book of Luke.

You might check out last week's reflection for more on the topic!

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Sermon-January-30.pdf>

This is a message that may well hit home for the folks on the sea shore

These are folks whose livelihood is most likely tied to fishing

And the fishing industry of First Century Jewish Palestine has been devastated under Roman occupation.

It's essentially been taken over and transformed from subsistence to commercial, creating processed fish and fish oils to feed the Roman military on campaigns elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

This includes massive construction projects, new harbours, and processing facilities, bridges, and roads which would have brought many day labouring carpenters to the area (PS – Jesus' occupation was a *tehton* – a carpenter, a builder) but also a new administrative system of licences, quotas and taxes, all of which results in vast over-fishing.

Not only has this been individually and collectively devastating for those whose ancestral families have relied on the sea for survival, but it's been communally devastating because rather than importing ethnically Roman bureaucrats, the Empire enlists locals to do this.

Locals who would manage the new system of licences and quotas, and taxes.

Who would set up their tables at the seaside...

People like Levi!

Which is why Mark points out that the call of Levi happens at the sea shore, to remind the audience that Levi is administering the very system that has impoverished Simon, James and John.

You can find a Reflection/Sermon from January 2020 on the Matthew version of this passage that seeks to explore in detail the socio-economic situation

[https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/d0f6c52d-efdc-d763-c0aa-0e0df7b1928c/2020\\_01\\_January\\_26\\_2020.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/d0f6c52d-efdc-d763-c0aa-0e0df7b1928c/2020_01_January_26_2020.pdf)

So, in Luke's version, Jesus is teaching, likely reminding the crowd of their ancestral tradition of Jubilee, which exists in such a contrast to the Roman Imperial cannibalistic economy.

Then Jesus asks Simon to put his nets in once more.

Simon, who, unlike Jesus, actually fishes for a living is reluctant but eventually acquiesces.

The result is astounding and the nets strained to almost breaking, and the boat nearly sinks.

But to me, the really baffling thing is Simon's reaction.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'

Now the word 'sin' has been so weaponized that I sometimes wonder if it is redeemable.

I am not sure if that word can help us at all understand what the writers of these texts were seeking to point their readers/listeners towards and if that word can help us today reflect on our own situations.

But the Hebrew Scripture passage we heard from Isaiah might give us something to work with.

The Lectionary brings these two together because Isaiah's response to meeting the Bat Kol, the voice of the Eternal, the Breath of Life in the temple is similar to Simon's response to Jesus here.

Contextually, there are some links as well.

Isaiah is written to the people recovering from the national trauma of exile in Babylon.

Luke is written to the people recovering from the national trauma of the Second Jewish Roman war and the destruction of the temple.

Is perhaps Simon's lament best understood, not as one who is "confessing sin" as it is often understood but as one who is exhausted and full of despair?

Recognizing not a fault of personal morality - because that is not how Scripture uses the word sin despite many a preacher making a lot of hay at the expense of the mental well-being of people descending into shame.

But is Simon, in seeing the possibility of abundance linked to Shalom and Jubilee recognizing how the lies of scarcity and division that mark the psychic warfare of empire have infiltrated his imagination?

I don't think that Simon's yes to Jesus is one of personal religious piety.

As I read this, I read someone who has been stuck in the proverbial belly of the proverbial beast awakening to a possibility.

I read Simon saying yes to new way of understanding himself and his community, yet grappling with the overwhelming shame of the system he's lived under until then.

And here is the thing.

Jesus' inexperienced fishing advice, was not a new innovation, but simply an invitation to put out a little deeper into the water and throwing the net over the other side.

Likewise, Jesus' teaching in Luke up to this point, has not been a brand-new religion never before articulated, but has been an invitation for his people to sink deep into their own stories where they will find that affirmation of self and community that allows them to embrace Sabbath and Jubilee and principles that will bring freedom to their people.

This is what Jesus is inviting these first followers to join.

This is what they are saying yes to.

Hope

Possibility

Connection

Community

Reconciliation

Later in the story we heard when Jesus and company are eating at Levi's house with the other tax-collectors, the Pharisees are outraged!

But what we're liable to miss is that this dinner party is an act of solidarity.

The workers and the tax collectors who are divided have come together.

And when they come together, they may begin to recognize how the ones across the table are not actually their opponents.

This is threatening to the Pharisees and their scribes because they profit on the division within the community which breeds inaction!

This week, over social media, we invited anyone who follows KMUC to join in some open-source theological reflection on what we believe it means to say yes to Jesus.

We invited reflection on how these stories might give us space to reflect on our experience of personal faith, ethical formation, spiritual practice.

Chances are that few of us have been washing nets after an exhausting night's work when the calloused hands of a day labouring carpenter turned Rabbi reach out to us inviting us to come and follow and fish for people.

So how have we

And how do we

Find Jesus offering an invitation into our lives?

For some it has come in the form of being raised in a religious tradition.

During which there have been touchpoints, some ritualistic, like baptism or confirmation, and some personal, moment in which we have decided what, if any, meaning, significance shall this have for me in my life?

There are streams in the Christian family in which a yes to Jesus means a no to any other way.

It means an absolute devotion.

For many that no longer feels fitting.

Instead for many a yes to Jesus feels like an invitation into an openness and affinity with the sacred in whatever form it comes.

For some of us, that instinct has been nurtured and affirmed.

For some of us, sadly it has not.

Whether overtly or through that which we have internalized, we feel the need to park out ethics, or activism, our belief in the power of Yoga, or reverence of nature, or love of science, or belief in psychology in the narthex before we enter the sanctuary.

This has, for many of us, impoverished our spiritual existence.

Leaving us perhaps like Simon reluctant to throw a net in again.

For some of us, our experience of Jesus' invitation to radical shalom and jubilee has been so carefully mediated through middle class, colonial, white religiosity and piety that we feel the need to park our expectations for anything that will move us, grip us, excite us.

I was thinking of this metaphor of going a little deeper and putting down a net again.

I like the imagery of depth and sinking, sometimes better than the often used raising and lifting.

Of lifting one's eyes away for the banal and earthly and en-fleshed, and focusing on the heavenly.

To me, sinking deeper is akin to the experience of meditative prayer, or returning to the body and breath. Of sinking down below the cerebral and into the nervous system and finding a depth that holds a compassion that calms the anxious Simon Peter in me.

Saying yes to this invitation isn't an act of will but an act of practice.

That yes happens each time I carve out 10 minutes to light a candle.

Those little yeses all occur in the context of an aspirational yes.

A yes to a life lived in service of love.

A yes to a spiritual ethic that opens and connects rather than insulates and isolates.

I wonder what yes looks and feels like to you?

I wonder if perhaps our way of framing this question doesn't fit your experience.

And I wonder how you would frame it differently.

Our texts next week takes us into Luke's framing of Jesus as teacher.

While Matthew places Jesus on a hillside for a sermon on the Mount

Luke seems intent on reminding readers of a different geographical context...

[Jesus] came down with them and stood on a level place

As we read this text next week, we continue to invite you to reflect on your own experience

In so many streams of the Christian path, the most important thing

Is to believe the right things about Jesus

Next week we explore how that trend develops in the early centuries of the Christian movement

And perhaps continues to persist

And how perhaps belief in Jesus

Hinders belief in the power of practicing the path Jesus teaches

I wonder how this sits with you.

Let us know over this coming week.

Become part of the conversation!