

“Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor:
Luke 5:1-11
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May my words be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Hear these words from the Book of Genesis (11:31-12:2)

Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred five years; and Terah died in Haran Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

My professor of Old Testament believed—as do many biblical scholars—that Abram did not actually exist, but was instead the center of the myth of the migration of the Israeli people to a land where they could prosper. Jesus would have grown up hearing these stories. He would have known that Yahweh appeared to Moses (Exodus 3:8) telling him that he had seen the misery of his people, that he would “bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

. . . A land of abundance

Fast forward from Genesis and Exodus to the story of the wedding feast at Cana, our Gospel reading a couple of weeks ago. Like the passage from Genesis, it is also a story of God’s abundance: Jesus turning water into wine, quietly saving the host from embarrassment.

And now, today, we hear the account of Jesus coming to the shore of the lake of Gennesaret, usually called the Sea of Galilee, about 25 miles from his home in Nazareth. He sees Simon, James, and John washing their nets, ready to call it a day because they have caught no fish. The crowd had been pressing in on Jesus, wanting to hear him teach, and so Jesus climbs into Simon's boat and asks him to put out a little way from the shore. . . .

. . . possibly to escape from the crowd

. . . perhaps to teach Peter, James, and John

Then, as Yahweh did in his commands to Abram and Moses, Jesus promises abundance. He tells Simon to “put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch,” Simon does so, and he is rewarded with so many fish that both boats begin to sink. Simon recognizes in that moment that Jesus is the Messiah. And he, along with James and John, leave their fishing to follow Jesus from their settled world to a new land, a place that would require their trust and courage.

They would, in a sense, become immigrants in their own country.

We are a land of immigrants, descendants of men and women who packed up their worldly goods to find a richer life in America.

A life of freedom. . . . A life of abundance. And they labored joyfully, with great thanks that there was more than enough for everyone.

When I was a hospice chaplain I met more recent immigrants—and descendants of immigrants—the Hispanic men, women, and children (some born in Mexico, but many born in Texas or Michigan) who came to the shores of Lake Michigan to pick summer crops. Most of them were bi-lingual or fluent in English, but some spoke no English. All had come for their share of the American dream: some eventually owned

vast plantations and orchards, and hired their Hispanic compatriots to work for them.

In June, when we spend two weeks in Saugatuck, we often go into Holland to shop or eat out. Each year we are more aware of churches for Spanish-speakers, grocery stores for Hispanic cooking. We catch up with José, the self-employed handyman our landlord hires to take care of his cottages. José's wife, Maria, also the child of migrants, is now an attorney for the city of Holland. Their children have graduated from college. They have found God's kingdom along the shores of western Michigan. And it is for them a place of un-ending abundance.

We can add their story of prosperity to the events found in Scripture:

- Yahweh giving to Abram vast acres of land
- Yahweh rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, promising them rich land on the other side of the Jordan
- Jesus turning water o wine at a wedding
- boats near to sinking from too many fish

Today, in this nation, and in much of the rest of the world, we do not see a theology of abundance taking hold. We don't see outstretched arms welcoming the immigrant. Indeed, most nations resist the newcomer, forgetting the words on the Statue of Liberty:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

We forget that we are all immigrants, except, of course, for the indigenous people whose land our ancestors supplanted. So often we try to justify ourselves when we dismiss the newcomers who hunger for a

better life. We forget that in God's kingdom there should be no quarrels about who deserves to find freedom and prosperity. There should be no walls to keep out men, women, and children desperate for a new life.

There should be no walls to keep them away from the altar, for all are welcome at God's table.

Believing that, and then acting on it, is difficult in the midst of all the shouting, but as Christians we are called to listen with loving hearts and open minds. We are called to a theology of abundance. We, like Simon, John, and James, are called to let down our nets. . .

. . . . to follow Jesus

Amen