

PRAYER: WE LISTEN

by Rev. Elaine Poproski

This is not a traditional sermon. Instead, it is an exercise meant to help us practice listening to God through Scripture. This is something we ideally practice with others because none of us hear God unfiltered. Everything we hear is filtered through our own biases, assumptions, worldview, language, etc. When we listen with others, in the context of Christian community, particularly if those others don't share our particular filters, we will have greater clarity about what God is communicating.

This morning, we're going to focus on Luke 5:1 – 11, listening for God's voice. I'll walk us through step-by-step. You may want to have a paper and pen handy, or some other way of noting things as we go.

1. Listen as I read the passage.

One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

⁵Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him.

2. I'm going to read the passage again. This time, rather than standing outside the story, as an observer of its events, we're invited to step into it with our imaginations.

¹One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God.

Can you feel the breeze on your face? Can you feel the warmth of the Mediterranean sun?

Can you hear the crowd around you? Is it noisy? Is it hushed, waiting for Jesus to speak? Is anyone even aware of Jesus' presence among them?

Who's in the crowd? Are you there with family, friends, strangers...?

What does it smell like in that crowd by the water? Are you uncomfortable surrounded by so many people? Are they masked?

² Jesus saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore.

Where are you? Are you in the crowd? Can you see Jesus clearly or is he distant and blurred?

Perhaps move from the crowd into the boat with Jesus. What does the crowd look like from there? How does it feel to be that close to Jesus?

Then Jesus sat down and taught the people from the boat.

What does Jesus' voice sound like?

Do you have to strain to hear him speak? Or is his voice clear?

What is Jesus' teaching like? What kind of teacher is he? Who does he remind you of?

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' ⁵ Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

You've been up all night, casting out your huge nets and hauling them back in again. Over and over and over. And you have nothing to show

for it. How do you feel? Are you exhausted? Frustrated? Maybe you're freshly invigorated by Jesus' teaching?

What is it about Jesus that makes you agree to try again with the nets, just because he said so?

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

What are you feeling? Can you feel the water under the boat? What's it like to feel your boat sinking?

Look at Jesus in the midst of all this. What kind of expression is on his face? Is he calm and serene? Is he laughing? Is he helping you haul in the nets? Is he sitting there watching you?

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

How do Simon Peter's words resonate with you? Are you feeling the same way? Do you feel his pain? his fear?

Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him.

How do those words of Jesus sound to you, in that boat, having just experienced such a miracle?

3. As we read through the story this time, was there anything that surprised you? Was there any particular part that grabbed your imagination? Are there questions that rose up in you as we listened and imagined ourselves in the story? Let's take a few minutes to reflect on these questions.

4. I'm going to read the passage one more time. As you listen, is there anything else that grabs your attention? Are any of your questions answered? Are more questions raised?

One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

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5. In a moment, you'll be invited to join into a small group of two or three people. This may be scary; it may feel risky. Please take the risk. This part is so important as we seek to hear from God. We don't listen in isolation just like we don't journey as Jesus' followers in isolation. Here's what I'd like you to do in your groups:
 - a. Share with the others in the group whatever it was that grabbed your imagination, struck you, raised questions for you... These are the clues that God is speaking.
 - b. Each time someone shares, the others in the group will reflect back briefly, in their own words, what they heard shared. This isn't meant

to be an evaluation or a dialogue. It's just meant to ensure clarity and understanding.

- c. Once everyone has shared, go through the group again, talking about what it might be that God is saying to you through this Scripture passage this morning. At this point, it may be helpful for the others in the group to offer any insights they might have.

Over the coming week, I'd like to encourage you to continue practicing listening to God through Scripture. Try using Luke 7:36 – 50 and doing with it just like we did this morning with Luke 5. Instead of just in one sitting, engage with the passage every day. You may want to break it up into parts. Figure out whatever is most helpful for you. And just like last week, connect with someone else who's also practicing this, this week, and share your experience with each other.