



February 6, 2022: The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany and Annual Meeting
Sunday
Go Deep or Go Home
The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Good Morning and welcome to Annual Meeting Sunday!

One of my favorite parts of Sunday worship is called the Sanctus. It is right near the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, right after the Celebrant says what is called the Proper Preface. The Proper Preface is a phrase that comes at the beginning of the prayer that is appropriate to the season. So, today, for example, the Proper Preface for the season of Epiphany is: *By the leading of a star, you have revealed your Son to the World and in following him we are led from darkness into his marvelous light.* And then, we sing the Sanctus.

The word Sanctus is the Latin word for *holy*. You may have guessed that the prayer comes from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the portion that Abby read for us a moment ago. It attempts to capture a mystical experience that Isaiah has in the Temple that is really beyond all comprehension. When I'm at the altar, and the choir and others in the chancel, and in the congregation, are around me singing, it feels Divine, like I am in the throne room of God, surrounded by singing seraphim.

Though I often feel unworthy, I don't have to worry about having a winged creature bring a burning, hot coal to purify my lips, fortunately. And while I can, and do, say to God, "Here I am, send me," I almost never have to be the bearer of horribly, catastrophic news, unlike Isaiah, that part of the Isaiah reading was optional, and so I left it out. But believe me, it is a rugged bit of Scripture. I have nothing so catastrophic to bring to you as Isaiah did.

But our Gospel reading today does point to something that I can name for us that is hard; it is not new, but it is hard, and Annual Meeting Sunday is a time to take stock of an important piece of where we are in this moment. And that is, like Peter and the other fisherfolk disciples...we may be tired and a bit discouraged. "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing."

Of course, this can apply to many aspects of our family, work, and social lives during the past couple of years, not just the life of our parish, and even more so to people who are not as well-resourced as most of us in this community are.

We have been working through the night; as a Church community, even before Covid, we had a sense that we were working hard as a Church but maybe we noticed fewer people in the pews, maybe missing people who had been members of our community for a long time. We noticed fewer children in Church, especially older children. And Covid introduced a whole new sense of disconnection and anxiety in our Church community.

Yet I want to say that all that hard work mattered, and matters. Look at this year's Annual Report and last year's as well. We are living out our Baptismal Covenant in so many ways, touching 100s, even 1000s of lives near and far. Our worship of God in the beauty of holiness continues, our music continues, our study of God's Word continues, our feeding and clothing of the hungry and naked continues, our



February 6, 2022: The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany and Annual Meeting
Sunday

Go Deep or Go Home

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

pastoral care for one another, our offering of our attractive spaces to community groups and businesses, continues. We have had some successful outdoor gatherings. We have learned new technical skills, especially. The faithful financial giving of many continues, and even increases. Our hardworking staff in the office supports all of this programmatic and physical plant work, with dedication and skill. All of this matters, and is a sign of faithfulness.

Back to the Gospel. We are blessed with some beautiful, stained-glass windows here at Christ Church. One of the windows depicts the Gospel story from Luke that we heard this morning. It's the window that's second from the front, on your left, as you face the pulpit. So, it's on my right, the second window from me. A photo of that window was in the eBlast on Thursday, and it's in your worship bulletin as you scroll to the end. You can take a look at it now if you want as I describe it.

We see Jesus in the back, standing in the sailboat that he was teaching from, towering over the scene. He extends hands in benediction over John, James, and Peter, who is holding on to the net full of fish, having followed Jesus' command.

The varied colors of the glass are so vivid, suggesting a variety of ways to look at and understand the story. In a preaching group I once was in, one of the exercises we engaged in was giving titles to the Scripture passages for given Sunday. Often times, names of passages are handed down with names stuck in tradition. For example, one of the traditional names for this passage is the "Miraculous Catch." It's not wrong. But in this preaching group, when we engaged in this exercise, our teacher said, don't feel bound to be "spiritual" or "reverent." So, what might we call this passage? What other colors of the story are there?

A snarky one might be: *Whiny fishermen schooled by Master Angler*. A more humorous one might be: *Gone Fishin'*. Getting more serious might be: *Fearful fishermen transformed by trust*. Serious and pithy might be: *Go deep or go hungry*.

Jesus' words are so powerful: "Put out into the deep water and let your nets down for the catch." "I will make you fish for people." Sometimes we feel out of our depth and are exhausted: "We have worked all night long but have caught nothing." And yet sometimes when we are at our lowest, Jesus asks us to take a risk and to go deeper: "Put into the deep water and let out your nets." And when we say yes, the promise is that the harvest is huge, though for us, we do not know precisely what form this bounty may occur.

What helps us to say "yes" to going deeper with Jesus when we are tired? When we feel like we've tried everything? When we get whiny, or frustrated, or exhausted? When we feel afraid and out of our depth?

We could go to Paul's words to the Corinthians, and to us, this morning: "I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you also



February 6, 2022: The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany and Annual Meeting
Sunday
Go Deep or Go Home
The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

stand, *through which are being saved*: Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ is risen. ... By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace has not been in vain.” We could go to the Psalm and say with the Psalmist: “I will give thanks to you, *with my whole heart*...I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your name, because of your love and faithfulness... when I called... you increased my strength within me.”

Here at Christ Church, we start to go deeper with Jesus with a few simple things, which I will describe in more depth in at Annual Meeting. First: We go deeper with Jesus by reconnecting with simple, playful fellowship. Next Sunday we’ll enjoy, a short, simple, fun Epiphany Party designed for children of all ages. We’ll see one another in person engage in a few fun activities; We continue in the tradition of the Wise Ones by bringing a gift to the Baby Jesus in the form of a book or donation for Storytime Crafts. We share the light of Christ.

Second: We go deeper with Jesus by taking the time to build a new foundation for our Church School. A team of parents and teachers is working with a consultant and me to rebuild our Church School community. The team has a proposal to share with the Vestry at its February meeting that will construct a sound foundation upon which to hire a new part-time paid staff member late in the summer. We will nurture new and renewed connections among our households with children still living at home. The Vestry has already committed funds for this position.

Third. We go deeper with Jesus by reconnecting with one another in a simple, proactive way. A new initiative out of our Pastoral Response Ministry team is called Circles of Caring, the goal of which is to ensure that every member of the Christ Church community receives regular check-ins from the parish, if desired. A team of callers is being put together with calls to start during Lent. We can help members of our community feel less isolated. It is one of the ways we can love our neighbor, as Jesus teaches.

The New Vestry will take up this invitation to go deeper. And we will have an opportunity in the breakout groups in the Annual Meeting to share how we think the Parish can go deeper with Jesus.

Now, despite the drama of this Gospel story, there are no quick fixes for us, no easy answers, no pat solutions. But we to start to go deeper. The African proverb says if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. We might say, if you want to go deeper, be ready to get to wet and to leave what you know behind. We leave what we know behind on the beach, and we also move toward Jesus who asks us to go deeper. We go deeper into the waters of Baptism; we go deeper into our willingness to take risks, to fail, to succeed to be vulnerable to one another and to God. We go deeper in our willingness to go in directions we hadn’t anticipated, deeper into planning, deeper into prayer, deeper into trust in the One who calls us to follow him.

Amen.