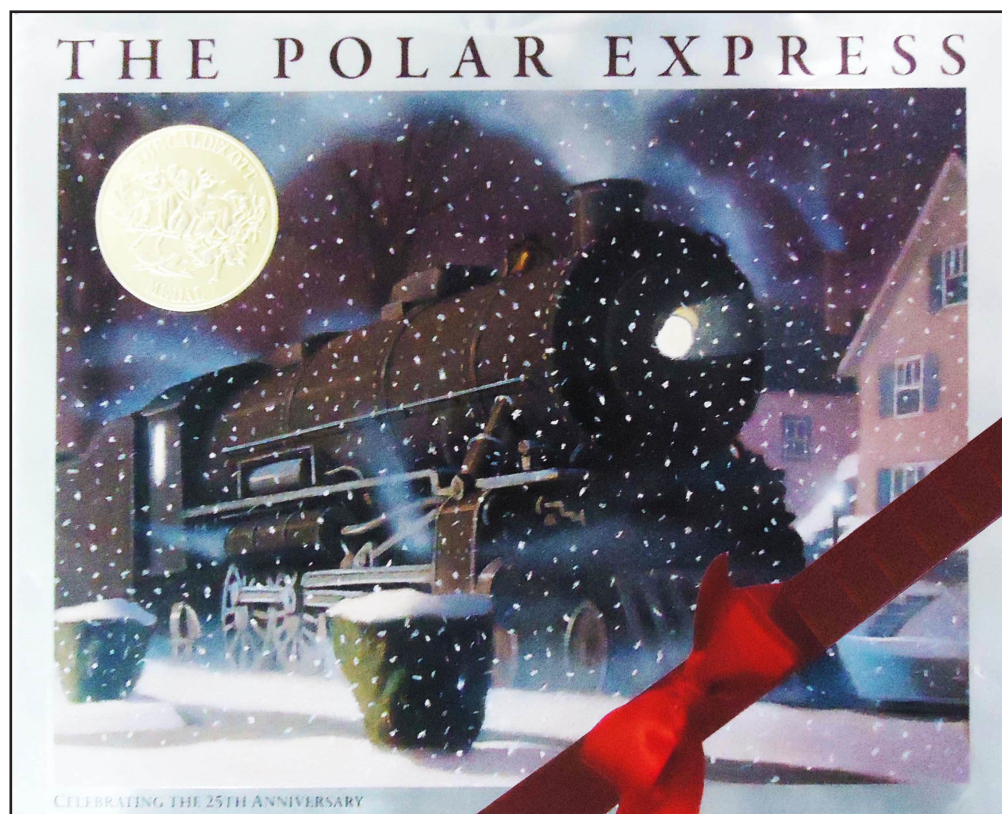


# Living Grace

CYCLE C 5TH SUNDAY  
ORDINARY TIME

“WHOLEHEARTED, MAGICAL FAITH”



*On a Christmas Eve many years ago, a boy lies in bed listening for the bells of Santa's sleigh, which he has been told by a friend do not exist. Later that night he hears not bells, but a very different sound. He looks out his window and is astounded to see a steam engine parked in front of his house! The conductor invites him to board the Polar Express, a train filled with children on their way to the North Pole. The train takes the children to the center of the city, where Santa and the elves have gathered for the giving of the first gift of Christmas. The boy is chosen to receive this first gift. Knowing that he can choose anything in the world, he decides on a simple gift: one silver bell from Santa's sleigh. Santa cuts a bell from a reindeer's harness, and the delighted boy slips it into his bathrobe pocket as the clock strikes midnight, and the reindeer pull the sleigh into the sky. When the children return to the train, the boy realizes the bell has fallen through a hole in his pocket. Heartbroken, he is returned to his home. In the morning, his little sister finds one small box with the boy's name on it among the presents. Inside is the silver bell! The boy and his sister are enchanted by its beautiful sound, but their parents cannot hear it. The boy continues to believe in the spirit of Christmas and is able to hear the sweet ringing of the bell even as an adult.*



## VOCATION OF ANDREW AND PETER

Illuminated Manuscript Miniature painted by Sano di Pietro, 15th Century

Duomo Piccolomini Library ~ Siena, Italy

### EXPLORING THE ART:

Illuminated manuscripts are small portable books popular in Medieval Europe that were created with calligraphy text on pages decorated with fancy initials, elaborate borders, and miniature illustrations. They were actually copied and painted by hand for over 1,000 years before the invention of printing. Unlike larger manuscripts held in monasteries or churches, these prayer books were created for individual, private devotion. The level of decoration and detail ranged from simple decoration in mass-produced examples, to ornate examples commissioned by the wealthy (as above). One of the most famous of these small manuscripts is the Book of Hours which contained the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) which was recited in monasteries. It was developed for lay people who wished to incorporate elements of monasticism into their devotional life. Today, the gold and precious pigments of these ancient illuminated manuscripts are often as fresh and vibrant as they were when first applied to the pages, making them some of the richest and best preserved repositories of medieval and Renaissance painting, and offer the largest resource for the study of artists' materials and techniques in Europe from the 6th to the 16th century.

### THE ILLUSTRATED WORD

# Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



## **ABIDE IN ME**

*Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts*

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.*

*~ John 7:7-9*

Read-aloud video link:

**THE POLAR EXPRESS**

Written & Illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 5:1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.

He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,

“Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

Simon said in reply,

“Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.”

When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.

They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them.

They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him,

and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”

**When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.**

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

## **FOLLOWING JESUS IS A CALL TO BELIEF AND ACTION. WHEN ANSWERED, MAGIC FOLLOWS IN ABUNDANCE!**

In today's Gospel story we hear about the disciples' initiation into becoming disciples, followers of Jesus. The story begins with Jesus teaching the crowds. It seems as if the guys just keep on fishing, instead of listening to Jesus. They are most likely concerned about providing for their families and making sure their day is fruitful. They had worked hard all day and night and still had not caught any fish. Jesus enlists their help in addressing the crowds, and they willingly assist. As Jesus finishes teaching, he turns to Peter to invite his participation in faith. "Put out your net, and you will have all that you need." Peter at first resists and then reluctantly complies. The boat begins to sink in abundance. All his needs are met and then some.

Christmas is a time of magical abundance in our culture. Even when there is an economic recession, it doesn't keep people from wanting to give to one another. Giving brings magic and provision into each other's lives. We give to our family members, and many take the next step beyond by giving to the community as well. In *The Polar Express*, Chris Allsburg invites us into a relationship of belief and magic. Our belief in Santa Claus is very much tied into the belief of a "benevolent giver". For Peter and the boy in the story, and for many people today, culture tells us not to believe. Some of the men that witnessed this miracle did not choose to follow Jesus. Peter received the invitation to believe, and so did the boy in the story. Both Peter and the boy took a step into the unknowing. After a long hard day putting the nets out, Peter does it once more? The boy jumps on a train bound for the North Pole in the middle of the night? What makes them different from the others?

"There is no Santa' my friend had insisted, but I knew he was wrong", thought the boy in the story. Peter says to Jesus, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets". Both Peter and the boy were chosen and invited to believe. The strength of their hearts and the risk of their actions, magically brought "fish that filled the boats so full that they began to sink", and "Santa marched over to us and he pointed to me I knew I could have any gift I could imagine, what I wanted more than anything was one silver bell from Santa's sleigh." Both the boy and Peter wonder in their astonishment, "How can this be?"

God wants us to know that we will be rewarded for the risks we take in choosing to follow him. We will be rewarded with a life of such great abundance, we won't be able to hold it all. Sometimes we take for granted, the magic of God's providence all around us - the way a seed opens in the dirt to magically provide us with the food and nourishment that we need; the love that we share around the table as our family wakes up in the morning each day; the presence of God we feel when we walk outside, look up at the sun, and feel a gentle breeze on our face.

**God's magical abundance is all around us. Let's encourage each other to open our hearts, our eyes, and our ears so that we can hear the bell that will always ring for those who have the faith to take risks and believe.**

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** What does your family do to celebrate Christmas Eve? What kind of thoughts and feelings do you experience on Christmas Eve? What is it that you are watching and waiting for?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** Santa is the "benevolent giver" for all Christian countries. What values does his love and generosity teach us? How does Santa call forth belief in the young and old?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** How did Jesus call forth belief in Peter and the fishermen? Jesus called Peter to participation, and the conductor called the boy to participation. What did they have to do in order to experience the magic of belief? What happened after the boy and Peter accepted their invitations to believe? How did they experience magic and abundance? They both responded at first with hesitation and then with trust. What did onlookers observe to be happening? How did it affect those people? Were they changed, too? How?

**How are we called to invite others into the magic of belief? What helps people believe in our experience? How do we keep "hearing the bell ring" even when others can't? Should we learn to trust our inner experiences of God over what others tell us? What can strengthen us to believe and receive, and to keep the magic alive?**

# Biblical Background

LUKE 5:1-11

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee (also called the Lake of Gennesaret) at mid morning. We know this because he sees fishermen who have returned to Capernaum after having fished all night on the lake. He sees many of them "washing their nets", an insight that suggests he does not fully understand what they are doing. These are gill nets, and in the process of catching, the fish thrash violently about in an effort to free themselves and often break the knots that hold the net together. These knots have to be re-tied in anticipation of the next nights fishing expedition. Since the work of fishing comes to an end with sunrise, a boat is available for Jesus to use as a platform a short distance from the crowds who press up on him. Peter will man the oars and keep the boat in close enough proximity to the shore that those gathered at the waters edge can hear Jesus teach.

**TERMS:** **Master** This is how Peter responds to Jesus and his request to put the boat out into deeper waters where he could put out his nets for a catch. A more graphic translation might be something along the lines of, "Sure Boss, whatever you say." Peter is being sarcastic at the expense of Jesus. What does Jesus know about fishing in the Sea of Galilee? Peter is a seasoned professional and knows that the market fish have all gone down deep to the center of the lake during the daylight hours to avoid birds of prey that frequent the area.

**"Depart from me for I am a sinful man"** This is what Peter says to Jesus after hauling in the huge catch of fish. Peter is really trying to say to Jesus that he has things under control now, and Jesus can get out of the boat so that he can get busy preparing these fish for market. The phrase seems theological but it is not. Peter is basically saying to Jesus, "I've got this now!" indicating that Jesus is in the way.

**CULTURAL INSIGHT:** When Peter realizes that a huge shoal of fish have filled his nets, he immediately "signals to his partners" (future Apostles James and John) to come to his aid in bringing the swelling net of fish to shore. Notice that Peter does not call out, but rather uses a "signal" to gain the attention of the partners, without alerting any other fishermen who might be in the area. Peter is sure that he has discovered a new "honey hole" where local market fish are going to be found in abundance and with ease. He would not have to sail across the lake to the typical fishing grounds near the biblical city of Bethsaida. The signal system maintains the secret location among the partners. "...they left everything and followed him." Who did they leave behind? A wife? Children? Aging parents? Yes, yes, and most certainly yes. Remember that in the New Testament world of the Middle East, men and woman lived in extended family units. Peter and the others could leave everything behind to follow Jesus secure in the knowledge that their fathers would care for their wives and children until their return.

**INSIGHT INTO MEANING:** Jesus meets us where we are and engages us in the activities that we most enjoy. Peter and the others were commercial fishermen who lived in Capernaum. Jesus approaches Peter when he has some time off after a long night of fruitless fishing. Jesus chooses the boat that Peter owns because he has been living in the home of Peter and his family (together with his own mother Mary) for the previous six months. Jesus has developed a relationship with Peter and his brother. He knows that they are ready to respond to a call to follow him when the time is right. Jesus provides this opportunity for Peter to say yes to this summons when he removes an obstacle to his response by providing a haul offish in an amount sufficient to cover household expenses for weeks to come. How could Peter refuse Jesus now? Look for evidence that Jesus is trying to speak to you in your day to day activities - in your work and in your play; when you are active and also when you rest. Jesus wants to reveal himself to each of us in the way that will put us most at ease. He will make all things possible so that we can say "yes". Yes, it is the right time to pick up our nets and follow him, too.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** Talk about “wholehearted, magical faith” as a family. What are its qualities? When have you seen it exercised in your family? What have been the rewards?

**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** TRUST & RISK

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Learn more about St. Nicholas as a bishop. What did he do to become so famous? How do people celebrate St. Nicholas in other countries? How do we follow his example, by giving selflessly and abundantly, to make the dreams, needs, and wishes of others to come true? As a family make a “giving list”. Come up with ways that you can give abundantly to others in the year ahead, recognizing God as the ultimate giver. What are some ways that you can become God-like (or Santa-like) through providing for others unexpectedly!