

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 6:1-8 [9-13]

Psalm 138

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

02/10/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10and so also were James and John,

sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

May the word of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you O’ Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Called

Good morning! Given the text we have today you might expect a witty story about fishing. My family certainly has the credentials, my great-grandfather was a great fisherman. He had numerous trophies and growing up, my dad and grandfather would take trips to Canada where they would be flown in by airplane to be dropped off for a week or two, where they would spend the whole time fishing. We grew up on the river, spending a great deal of time on our boat growing up. There’s just one problem... I hate fishing. I went some when I was little, but I never caught a fish. After a few different tries it became clear that I just didn’t have the focus for something like fishing and so I retired from the sport at a young age to spend time with my family and pursue other interests.

Instead, today we’re going to talk about our call to salvation. Interestingly, the text is a little tricky in our Gospel lesson. When we read Jesus speaking to Peter in verse 10 he says:

“from now on you will be catching people.” One scholar points out that: *“Jesus is saving men*

*and women alive' for the kingdom. 'to take men and women alive' is a very different image from simply catching them as though they were food to be consumed... the verb is 'used in the Septuagint to denote rescue from peril of death, not the capture of animals — and so [it is] as inappropriate to fishing as it is appropriate to the Christian mission which it initiates.'*¹

But that's getting ahead of ourselves, let's back up and talk about how we got here and what's going on. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' ministry begins with his baptism. Following that, he is driven into the wilderness for his temptation. The previous two Sundays have chronicled his activity in his hometown and them trying to kill him for it. Between last Sunday's text and today's, we have a short section of healings in Capernaum, most notably Simon Peter's mother-in-law. After some more teaching in synagogues we pick up the story with his teaching on the side of the Sea of Galilee. Luke calls it the "*lake of Gennesaret*" but this is Luke's name for what the rest of us know as the Sea of Galilee.²

It's next to that body of water that Jesus begins to teach. The normal teaching pose was for the teacher to sit down and teach. Almost exactly the opposite of how teaching is done now. You might have seen famous paintings of Jesus sitting on a large stone and the crowd around him listening, it would have been like that. But the crowds are too large and so he commandeers a boat so that everyone can hear him. At the end of his teaching he calls on Peter to cast out his net again. Now, put yourself in Peter's position. This guy has just healed your mother-in-law, something which may or may not have been a good thing in Peter's mind... He's just been fishing ALL night and he didn't catch anything... and this guy tells you to casually throw out

¹Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 335

² Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990. p. 70.

your net one more time... OK, Jesus, whatever you say... But it actually works! The catch is so large that extra boats need to come over and help haul in all the fish! An archeological dig in the mud near the Sea of Galilee from around the first century has found what they think to be a similar fishing boat. We're not talking a little canoe here, the boat was 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet deep.³ Just to give you an idea, that's the distance between the edge of the altar rail and the door to the sanctuary. That's a big boat... and that's a lot of fish! I like to imagine that Simon looked over at James and John and said those now famous words for the first time: "We're going to need a bigger boat!"

And it's after this miracle that Jesus calls his first three disciples in the Gospel of Luke: Peter, James, and John. One of the things I like is that this Gospel gives us a reason for their following. Jesus isn't some unknown preacher they haven't ever met. He has literally just performed a miracle unlike anything they had ever seen right before their eyes. Who wouldn't follow a guy with that kind of power?!

Which brings us back to Jesus' call for Peter. Unlike in the Gospel of Matthew, which is reflected in today's banner, the words in the Gospel of Luke are a little different. Luke has Peter fishing for more than just men, but the word would be better understood as saving human beings, not fishing. Jesus is calling Peter to service in God's church. Fred Craddock writes the following. *"Notice also that Simon's response to the power and knowledge of Jesus is not a fisherman's response: that is, he did not say, Why did I not know where the fish were? Rather, his response is that of a human being in the presence of one he now calls Lord. Simon's skill is not the issue; the*

³Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p.94.

issue is his life. Yet in Jesus' eyes his sin does not disqualify him; the same power that prompted Simon to fall at Jesus' knees now lifts him into God's service."⁴

Did you catch that little part at the end? Peter has no excuse! Jesus knows he's a sinner and calls him into service anyway. When I talk with people about opportunities to serve in the church they most always bring up things like their lack of education in a given religious topic, or how they're not strong enough to lead in that way. Well, it doesn't get much worse than Peter! And here we see him following at the drop of a hat! Another commentator writes: *"Regardless of what Jesus may have seen in the fishermen, to contend that he called the most capable or most qualified to be his disciples would contradict an important part of the Gospel story. The fishermen were not called because of their qualifications, character, or potential. God's call is as unpredictable as it is unmerited."*⁵ If you think God is calling only the few and the proud, you're wrong! If God had waited to call me until I had become a better student, until I was ready... we would all still be sitting around! God is calling all of us to service in God's church! It's the same thing in our first reading. The prophet Isaiah is a *"man of unclean lips,"*⁶ unfit for service, and yet God calls him anyway!

So maybe you're on the edge, or maybe you're ready, and you're sitting there thinking "I'm ready to serve, but what do I say?" I'll share a little secret with you. On internship my supervisor was a wise man and would repeatedly yell at me saying "You don't need to re-write the book!" The church has been stealing good ideas from other people from the very beginning!

⁴ Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990. p. 70.

⁵ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p.95.

⁶ Isaiah 6:5 NRSV

Don't believe me? Take a look at the second reading from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Paul writes "*3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*"⁷ Now I love that story for a few reasons but right here we see that sharing the good news, of "saving human beings" is a matter of handing on to others what we have been handed first. Sometimes people get tired of speaking the creeds, but what we have right here in First Corinthians might be the earliest known form of a Christian community! We speak them because they were given to us! They tell others what we believe!

So, my question for you today is the same as so many have asked before me: Are you ready to save some souls? Are you ready to serve? If you're not... get ready, 'cause God has big plans for all of us. Amen.

⁷ I Corinthians 15:3-5 NRSV