

Fifth Sunday after Trinity, Sunday, July 17, 2022

Readings: 1 Kings 19: 11-21, 1 Peter 3: 8-15, Luke 5:1-11

Jesus Makes Fishers of Men

The Lord called fishermen to be fishers of men (Luke 5:1–11). The net they would use is the message of the cross, which is foolishness and a stumbling block to the world (1 Cor. 1:18–25). The power of God to save is not in spectacular signs like wind and fire and earthquakes (1 Kings 19:11–21), nor is it to be found in human intelligence and wisdom. The power of God to save comes in the still, small voice of the preaching of Christ crucified. In worldly darkness the disciples could catch nothing. But in the light of Christ, whose Word was attached to the water, the boats were filled with fish. So it is that in Baptism you have been drawn into the ship of the Church. Though the nets are breaking and some who hear the Word do not believe, pastors continue to cast the net of the Gospel and the Sacraments, that Christians may abide in the boat of the Church and that we may be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:8–15).

Sermon Transcript:

We begin in the name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. As I mentioned, the text for this morning's message is based upon the Epistle reading from 1 Peter.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was just after Ben Franklin's kite flying days when some Frenchmen were experimenting with electricity. They wanted to know how fast it moves. The abbot of a large monastery volunteered his monks for the experiment. The monks had taken a vow of obedience, so they had no choice. They lined up a thousand of the monks, each holding the hand of the person next to him. Then the electric current was applied to the first man in the line. And according to an account of this experiment, every one of those 1000 monks jumped into the air precisely at the same moment. And I'm sure that would've been quite a sight, right? Well, I draw three conclusions from this story. First, electricity moves at astonishing speed. Second, abbots in French monasteries in the 18th century had tremendous authority over their monks. And third, wouldn't it be wonderful if a thousand people in the church today could get excited enough to jump into the air at the same time?

It's hard to get that much cooperation in most churches. In his Epistle, Peter tells us that we are to be a big, happy family. Well, you and I know that even the happiest of families have their problems. I like the story of a family who changed churches from Methodist to Presbyterian. The little boy was slow to make the transition in the Lord's prayer. And his older brother said, "You don't even know how to say the Lord's prayer. You don't say, 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' You're supposed to pray, 'forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead against us.'" Well, I suspect there isn't anyone in this church family who is dead against us. And yet within the happiest of families, there are bound to be conflicts. St. Peter advises us to watch our tongues, to pray for one another, to forgive one another and to love one another.

A big happy, family; that is the ideal model for the church. But how do we evoke that harmonious relationship in the church today? Where do we find the electricity that will cause a hundred of us, or even a thousand of us, to jump into the air at the same time? We find it by reminding ourselves who we are and what we are about. We do it by asking ourselves three questions every time we meet to do ministry.

The first question we need to ask every time we meet as a church is this, "What can we do to help people love God more?" We are not in the business of building beautiful buildings. We are not in the business of producing ear-pleasing music or preaching great sermons. We are in the business, first of all, of helping people find God and experience love through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Many people are afraid of God. They're afraid of entrusting their lives to him for fear that he will place some intolerable burden on them. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade, once dealt with this beautiful problem in this way. He wrote, "My wife and I have two grown sons. Suppose that when they were little boys, they had come to greet me when I returned home from a trip and said, 'We love you. We missed you. We are so excited about you being home. We have been talking together and we have decided that we will do anything you want us to do. From now on, you issue the command, and we will obey without any questions. We just want to please you.' "What do you think would've been my attitude in response to their expression of love for me?" Dr. Bright asked. "If I had responded the way many people think God would respond, if they said to him, 'Lord, I'll do anything you want me to do. I'll go anywhere you want me to go.' I would've taken them by the shoulders, look at them with an evil eye and said, 'I've just been waiting for you to say that. Now I'm going to make you regret your decision to trust me as long as you live. I'm going to take all the fun out of your lives. I'll make you miserable as long as you live.' No, I wouldn't have said that. I would've put my arms around them and given them a big hug and said, 'Zach, Brad, I love you too, and want to justify your faith in me. I want to be a better father to you. I want to do everything I can to help you find full and meaningful lives.'"

Do you really think that God would respond in any other way to your response of love and loyalty to him? My primary purpose as a preacher is to tell you that God loves you and to help you respond to His call in love. For by grace, you have been saved through faith, it is a gift of God.

You may have heard of a Marine creature called a limpet, that lives in a cone-shaped shell and clings tenaciously to rocks by the seashore. It is so sensitive to the approach of danger that when a person comes near, it clings tightly to a rock. It is almost impossible to pry it loose. How wonderful it would be if each of us could cling to God in the same way that a limpet clings to a rock.

Philip Brooks preached a sermon on the phrase from the Gospel of John that reads, "Make the men sit down. The people were pushing and crowding around Jesus. In order for Him to be able to minister them, it was necessary for them to sit down, so they could receive from Him what He was prepared to give." That is what this divine service is all about.

So the first task of the church is to help people love God more, and the second task is to help us love one another more. The Living Bible translation of Peter's words go like this: "You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God's help for them, for we are to be kind to others and God will bless us for it."

Here is the real strength of the church. It is to love each other and share that love with one another. If we could only help people know that that love exists here in the church, in this congregation. Bennet Cerf, who

many remember as the master of ceremonies of the TV program 'What's My Line' was once asked, "What are you most afraid of?" And his reply was, "I have to admit that the thing I am most afraid of is not being loved." My friends, there are a lot of people in this world with that great fear. If they only knew that the church is not only people loving God, but also people loving one another.

In his book, *Rebuild Your Life*, Dale Galloway tells about an experience he had when he was a custodian at a large church, while he was a student at Olivet College in Illinois. And he writes this: "One Saturday, as I was cleaning the sanctuary, I had the windows open, and a little bird flew in. Once inside, the bird flew around, having a good time, looking that huge church over. What an adventure. So exciting and new. And then all of a sudden it dawned on that little bird, he was trapped inside the sanctuary. At least, it seemed that way to me as I watched him. Then he began to fly back and forth looking for some way out of the church building. I found myself wanting to help the trapped, panic-stricken bird. After a while he landed upstairs in the balcony. I ran up the stairs. You would've thought I was crazy if you had been watching me. As I reached down to pick up the little bird, he took off again. Back downstairs I went, from one end of the church to the other, following him. Trying to escape its captivity, he hit up against the top of the window, but he could not find his way out. The struggle went on for a long time. Then in utter exhaustion, giving up, the bird fell to the floor. He was not dead, but he must have felt half dead. I walked over to where he was, knelt down, reached out my hands and gently picked up the fallen bird. I carried the bird in my hand over to the window and opened my hands, and the little bird flapped his wings and flew away with a new life. He was free, free to fly and climb to new heights."

Galloway goes on to write, "Just a few years ago, I was broken. Torn apart emotionally, trying this and that to find a solution. Then one day completely exhausted, not knowing what to do or how to get out of my situation, I fell into the loving hands of my Heavenly Father. He picked me up. He nursed my wounds with His love. He held me close to His heart. He healed me of all my brokenness and made me whole. God has set me free to fly to new heights again."

I have seen God work that sort of thing for people, and quite often He uses the church to lift the broken and bruised to life and freedom once again. And look around this room this morning for someone who needs your love, someone who lost a loved one, or is in desperate need of a word of encouragement. Someone who has a deep disappointment or a deep hurt, someone who has been ravaged by sickness. There's only one kind of church that has enough electricity to cause a hundred people or even a thousand people to jump at once, and that is a church where people truly love and care for one another.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once asked a missionary from one of the islands in the Pacific, which was the greatest virtue of the people whom he helped there. And he answered, "I can tell you, their greatest virtue in terms of what they regard as their greatest vice, namely "kaipo", which is the sin of eating alone. Some of them would go without food two or three days until they could find someone with whom they could share their blessings." Think about that for a moment, the sin of eating alone. At the center of our Christian faith, there has been a table where this family of faith breaks bread and drinks from the cup together.

So our first task is to help people love God. Our second task is to love one another. And there's a third task, of course, and that is just as vital as the first two. We must love the world for which Christ died. You may have heard the story of a five-year-old who attended a regular worship service for the first time. The preacher was one of those who rants and raves and roars when he preaches, and the pulpit was shaped like a big box in

which he stood. And when the preacher got all warmed up that morning and started pacing back and forth like a tiger in a cage, and pounding on the pulpit and shook his fist, the youngster became frightened. And he turned to his grandmother and whispered, "Grandma, what are we going to do if he gets out of there?" Trying to comfort the little fella, the grandmother replied, "Don't worry. He never has."

A lesson: a congregation that never gets out of the pulpit or out of the pew or goes out the door to the world outside has never properly understood the Gospel. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That is the Gospel. It is for the world that the church exists.

Walter Caver tells of attending a Rotary Club meeting on one day when they were paying tribute to a manager of a business, which was celebrating its hundredth anniversary. "A century is a long time," said the president. "Only an organization based on sound principles and rendering vital services could have lasted so long." Then looking around the room he asked, "Is there anyone else in the club who represents a firm that has been in existence for a hundred years?"

A minister stood and said, "President Jim, I have the honor of representing an organization that has been at work in this community ever since its inception and in the world for almost 2000 years. No organization ever founded has been based upon sounder principles or rendered more vital services than the church of Jesus Christ."

And here's how you carry on that electricity. Here is how you remain that big, happy family God means for you to be, to make sure that everything you do in the church contributes to these three central tasks, to help people love God more, to help us love one another more, and to render loving service to the world outside. That is who we are and what we are about. And by the grace of God, we'll continue to be that for many years to come. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ, Jesus. Amen.