

Fifth Sunday after Trinity, Sunday, July 9, 2023

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

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, so we have some very interesting things going on, especially with the Old Testament and the Gospel. So we'll start with the Old Testament. We have the story, the events of Elijah towards the end of his life. Now, I don't know about you, but normally when I think of Elijah, I think of this great and mighty servant of God. He is the one who stood on the mountain with the prophets of Baal, and 450 of them were crying out trying to get Baal to send down lightning on the altar. And then he, by himself, as the prophet of God, is standing by the altar and he says, "God, show your might." And boom, the fire from heaven comes, not only destroys and consumes the sacrifice, but the wood underneath the sacrifice, the stones underneath the sacrifice, and the dirt underneath that which was soaking wet, because they poured a ton of water on it. And it was bone dry at the end with nothing left, but a scorched patch of earth. That's the Elijah that I think of, the great and powerful man of God. But the events that we have here are almost immediately following that. Now, imagine this. You're the prophet of God. You have just shown through your prayer and God's presence through the power of the Holy Spirit, that the God that we worship in Israel, is the true God who showed this marvelous miracle of destroying the altar. And the people responded by killing the prophets of Baal, getting that heresy and that fault teaching out of the nation, and then Elijah goes to the palace, and the Queen Jezebel swears on her own life that she will kill Elijah by the next day. And so what does the mighty prophet of God do? He runs away. He tucks tail, and runs in fear. And he doesn't go just a short distance away, he runs all the way through Israel, which is the northern kingdom, he runs all the way through Judah, which is the southern kingdom, and he runs out into the wilderness to the Mount Sinai, where Moses and the people gathered for the Ten Commandments. He fled about as far away as he possibly could. He was despairing. He wanted to die. He believed he was all by himself, and nobody worshiped God but him, and his ministry was useless and pointless, and he was afraid. And I just marvel, this man of God, cowering in fear in a cave, on a mountain. Questioning whether God can take care of him after he had just seen the mighty works of God. Now, that gives me hope, because God still loved Elijah, and still used Elijah, even to the very end. So much so, that Elijah, of course,

went into heaven on the fiery chariot. God loved him so much that Elijah didn't die. He just went to God directly.

Now, if this man has questions about how God is going to work in his life, that gives me hope. Because let's look at our own lives. Have we seen the mercy of God in our lives? If we look back on our lives, can we point to moments of time in our life where it's very obvious that it was only the grace of God that brought us through that moment? How often have we seen God act in our own personal life? And yet, how often when a new crisis comes, do we doubt and worry and fret? We have seen the majesty of God ourselves, and yet when the new crisis comes, we cower in fear, afraid for our lives. Now, sometimes there's a lot to be afraid of. We turn on the news, and it seems like the world's going to hell in a hand basket and everything's going crazy. There's war and rumors of war, there's civil unrest, there's evil being called good, and good being called evil. There are people being shot and killed and destroyed in this life. And there's wars all over. And we think, "Wow, what is going on?" And we maybe are afraid. Or maybe, it's the job that didn't quite work out the way we thought it was. Or our 401k hasn't quite done as good as we had hoped, and now we're not quite sure what we're going to do. Or maybe we got a health diagnosis and it was pretty scary. Maybe even terminal. Or maybe our relationships are in chaos, and we don't know how we're going to get through this. There's all sorts of times in our life where we are afraid, where we are uncertain whether God can take care of us. Now, I don't think consciously we say, "Well, God, I don't think you can take me through this situation." But unconsciously, we worry, because we're not sure. But from Elijah, we have this assurance that God is faithful even when we are not. Even when we are cowering and questioning God, even when we feel like we're the only one in the world that is going through this, God assures us that He is with us and that we are not alone. Not just because He is with us, but because we have the fellowship of all of us together, the believers in Christ who are praying for us, and loving us, and caring for us.

And then we have Jesus and Simon. Simon, I've got to love. He's he's a man after my own heart, he sticks his foot in his mouth, left right and center, and yet still, God loves him and uses him. Now, this is before he really does some of his really dumb stuff. But at this point, this is right at the beginning of the ministry where Jesus is calling His disciples. It's Simon Peter, it's Andrew, it's James and John, so four of His disciples are here with His boat and His fish miracle that's going to be happening. And so Jesus is speaking, and He's in the boat and you got to imagine what Simon is thinking. Maybe he's seen Jesus around, maybe not. He knows Jesus is a rabbi, and Jesus comes and just sits on his boat and tells him, "Stick it out into the water." And Simon's going, "Okay." So he pushes the boat out into the water, and Jesus preaches for a while, and then He says, "Okay, Simon, let's go out into the middle of the sea again, and let's go fishing for some fish." And then you can see Peter going, "We worked all night. Got nothing." If you've ever been fishing, you know fish don't bite in the middle of the day. They just don't. Whether it's with a net, or it's a fishing reel, they don't bite in the middle of the day. So this experienced fisherman is talking to this rabbi, this intellectual who thinks He knows everything, and wants to go out fishing. He says, "Okay, fine, let's go out." And they go out, and what happens? A miracle. Such a large catch of fish that they need two boats, and even that could barely contain all the fish. And you've got Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John looking around going, "What just happened? Who is this person? What have we just experienced?" And what they come to realize is they don't fully know that this is God incarnate yet, but they know this man speaks for God. They know this man is a prophet, and they know they are unworthy. And so Peter says, "Depart from me, for I'm a sinful man, oh Lord." And the thing of it is, you notice Jesus doesn't correct him. Peter said he was a sinful man, and Jesus agreed with him.

"Yes, you are a sinful man, but I am going to make you the fishers of men. I am going to use you in spite of yourself. In spite of your shortcomings, in spite of your sin, I am still with you, and I have called you to be My children, and to serve Me with all joy and thanksgiving."

And that again gives us comfort and hope. If God can love Peter with all of his "uniqueness", then certainly God can love us. And we can also be reassured that though we also, like Peter, are sinners, and have no right to expect the grace of God, He gives it to us anyway, because He loves us. Because He wants us to know the peace that comes from His presence. He wants us to live a life of compassion and sympathy and unity. He calls us to listen to His Word, and to cease the worry and the fret, but also cease the reviling and repaying evil for evil. How often do we want revenge on somebody or something? How often do we get frustrated at somebody, and wished that something ill would befall them so that they would know how badly they hurt us, or how wrong they were? But that's not what God calls us to do. He calls us to be joyful and thankful no matter what happens, because we know the God who blesses. We know the God who saves, and we know that even if we face hardship and trials and tribulations, even when we face death, we know that God is with us, and that He will bless us. Elijah and his despair was soon to see God face to face, was soon to receive the reward of his salvation. Simon Peter was soon to see God in action, and was there to see Christ on the cross, dying for our sins, and was there to see His resurrection. So much so, that at the end of his life, he also was crucified for his faith. Of course, he asked to be crucified upside down, because he didn't feel like he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord and Savior. But he did that with joy. Not because he enjoyed dying or suffering, but because he knew his Savior.

And so we can be zealous for what is good, because we know that no one can harm us. Okay, yes, we may face persecution, and yes, we may suffer ridicule for our faith. But that can't hurt us, because we are God's children, and He will never leave us nor forsake us. And He gives us a peace which surpasses all understanding, a joy of our salvation, a joy that we can have even in the midst of trials and tribulations, because we know that exists. Christ Himself said, "In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world." So we know that Christ has overcome, not just generally, but specifically for us. He has overcome our sin. He has overcome our trouble. He has overcome our worry and doubt and fear, and He has given us peace. So much so, that we do not need to be afraid or troubled. In fact, more than that, we are called to be ready in season and out, be prepared to make a defense, for anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is within you. See, when people look at you, they are to see a person of hope, of joy, of confidence. Why? Because you know the story. You're ready to give a defense. Now, this doesn't mean you have to have a dissertation of everything in Scripture, and get everything laid out, it's very simple. What is our testimony? What is our defense? I'm a sinner like Peter. Christ is my Lord and Savior. God made flesh. He died and He forgave my sin, and therefore, I am free from the judgment of God. That's it. That's the defense. The Holy Spirit's going to do the rest. All you do is glory in the joy of your salvation.

So in this time, where you may face troubles, personal, or universal, or nationwide, or whatever may come, remember this, God is with you. There's nothing to be afraid of. He has blessed you already in your baptism and made you His child, and He does not forget His children. He knows us by name, and He loves us. And He keeps us in his protective arm every day of our life. Even if we are His wayward children, even if we are His doubting children, even if we are His fearful children, He does not forsake us, and He does not leave us.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.