

7.1.2018 Trinity 5 (Luke 5:1-11)

Is there anyone here this morning who likes being told how to do their job? No? Me either. Nobody likes to have a co-worker or even a supervisor come over and start telling them the right way to do something. When you're a skilled professional, that's just annoying, but I'm sure we can all agree that there is something even worse: When a person who knows absolutely nothing about your profession tells you how to do your job. Unsolicited advice or instruction from someone who is knowledgeable in your field of expertise can be irritating, but being told how to do your job by someone who has never done your job can quickly lead to some tense moments and create a big problem.

With that thought in mind, consider our Gospel reading this morning and put yourself in St. Peter's shoes for a minute. Peter was a man who made his living as a professional fisherman. When you think of Peter, you might picture the stereotypical commercial fisherman: rugged, strong, and ready to confront any challenge. The fisherman, even in the twenty-first century, has a very difficult, sometimes deadly job. Just imagine what it must have been like in the first century. Peter was certainly a man who knew how to do his job, but that fact did not stop Jesus from telling Peter and his companions how to fish. Our Lord said to Peter, and to this group of tired professional fishermen who had worked all night and caught nothing, "*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught*" (Luke 5:4).

To our inexperienced ears Jesus' words don't sound unreasonable, but if you were Peter, this is exactly the type of fishing advice that you would expect to receive from a carpenter's son. "Peter, let's go fishing. Launch out into the deep and let down your nets!" To a seasoned, first century fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, this suggestion would have made no sense at all. These men who grew up fishing, whose families had fished these waters for generations, knew that this was not the way to catch fish. The professionals fished at night when the fish were most active, and they fished the warm, shallow water close to shore, but Jesus was telling them to cast their nets into the deep, cold water in the middle of the day.

Consider that fact for a moment. Jesus was not only telling these men how to

do their job, He was telling them to do the opposite of what they had always done. His advice was contrary to everything they knew and everything they had experienced as professional fishermen. The response we would expect to hear from Peter is the response we would expect from the captain of any fishing boat: “No. I’m the captain of this boat. I know how to fish, and this is not the way it’s done. I will not waste my time and money fishing in deep water in the middle of the day.” This is the response we expect, but it’s not the response that Peter offers. Instead, this is his startling reply: “*Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net*” (Luke 5:5).

Peter was an experienced, professional fisherman who certainly had a different idea of how to catch fish, nevertheless, he responded to Jesus’ word in obedience and faith, and we know how this story ends, we know the result of his obedience. Peter and his companions, who had fished all night and caught nothing, let down the nets at Jesus’ Word and caught so many fish that their nets began to break. They called for their partners help and the men filled both boats with so many fish that they begin to sink. After Peter, a professional who had fished these waters his entire life witnessed this miracle, he was so astonished that he fell down at Jesus’ feet and said, “*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*” (Luke 5:8). To which Jesus replied, “*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*” (Luke 5:10).

Theologians have always interpreted this passage as an account of our Lord calling His first disciples and giving them a lesson in evangelism. This was the day that they brought their ships to land, forsook all, and followed Him. This was the day that they stopped casting their man-made nets in search of what would fill their stomachs, and began casting the nets of Grace and Truth, of Word and Sacrament. Instead of hauling fish out of the sea that would die on the deck of the boat, these men lifted people out of the depths of sin and death, and led them to the Way of life and salvation.

These men were called to cast the net of the Gospel, and as they did, they certainly remembered the lesson our Lord taught them in the deep, cold water in the middle of the day. What they learned that day is that He is the Great Fisherman. They had fished all night, relying on their own knowledge and experience, and caught nothing. He directed them to cast their nets in a way

that was contrary to everything they knew and everything they'd experienced, and their nets burst with a miraculous catch. When we are called to begin the work of building His Kingdom, our Lord often directs us to cast His net in places that we never have before, and in ways that seem like a waste of time and money, but through this Gospel lesson He assures us a successful catch, and even in those times when we think that we've caught nothing, we can rely on the promise of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah (55:11 NIV). God said, the "*word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*"

The events found in our Gospel passage this morning took place 2,000 years ago, but they are particularly relevant, a person may even say providentially appointed for this day as we prepare to cast the net of the Gospel in a way unlike anything we've ever done before. As we consider this Gospel lesson, it is important to remember that throughout Church history the image of the Church has been that of a ship. If you looked at a diagram that identified the different parts of a church building, you would discover that you are seated in what is called the nave. The word nave is from the Latin word (*navis*) for ship.

You are in the ship, and our Lord has given the command: "*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*" After hearing the Gospel this morning, how will you respond to His Word? Will you listen to the voice that tells you, "Stay close to shore. It's safe here in this shallow, lukewarm water. Keep doing what you're doing. Fish your way. Live your way." Or, like St. Peter, will you choose to chart a different course, the course of obedience and faith?

The course of obedience and faith to our Lord's command is going to look a little different for all of us, because on a ship and in God's Church the duties that must be carried out are many and various. This month one person may respond obediently by volunteering to help at the fair, while another might express their faithfulness by committing to worship God in His Church every Sunday, and yet another may set this course through daily, fervent prayer for the needs of the Church and the people of God. There are countless ways that we can leave the lukewarm, shallow water behind us and launch out into the

deep.

In conclusion, just once more put yourself in Peter's shoes, and not as you see him today, as a saint in God's Church, but as he was on that day, as a rugged fisherman just trying to make a living on the Sea of Galilee. On that day, Peter and his companions had no idea what God was preparing them for. They had no clue that they were men who would be eyewitnesses to the redemption of the world, and that through their life and ministry, by the grace of God, billions of people would be led to faith in our Lord.

Put yourself in Peter's shoes and recognize the truth that this is how it begins for all of us. As our story unfolds, we don't know what God has planned for us, and this side of heaven we may never know the future significance of our present obedience. St. Peter went to his death never knowing that 2,000 years later, in this little church named after his brother, we would be learning from his obedient, faithful response to the Word of God. May God grant us the humble obedience of unquestioning faith, that we may, like Peter, cast the net of the Gospel when and where He commands, for what Jesus said to Peter, He says to us: "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*"