

7.21.2019 Trinity 5 (Luke 5:1-11)

A rite of passage is a celebration of the passage which occurs when an individual leaves one group to enter another. It involves a significant change of status in society. There are many formal examples of such rites that are easily recognized in our culture, such as, your first day of kindergarten, your high school graduation, your first job, your wedding day, or the day you retire after spending 30, 40, or 50 years as a member of the workforce. When I read the Gospel reading appointed for today, it often brings to mind a less formal rite of passage that took place among the group of kids that I grew up with. I was raised in the desert and this time of year, as you can imagine, we spent a lot of time at the public pool, and the rite of passage I'm referring to took place between the small wading pool (which was less than two feet deep) and the large main pool which was much, much deeper.

Our summertime rite of passage looked something like this: When you were very young, your mom would take you to the pool, and then she would proceed to sit down like a mother hen and watch you splash around in the shallow water of the wading pool. As the years passed, the day eventually came for that rite of passage, the day when your mom no longer went with you to the pool, but just dropped you off where you would hang out with your friends in the deeper, more adventurous, and more challenging water of the main pool. There was no diploma, no first paycheck, and no rings were exchanged, but a rite of passage had occurred. Your status in society had changed, and as you looked back at the shallow water of the wading pool, you realized it was now part of your past. What you had learned in your time there was the foundation of this new, larger life, but it was clear that splashing in that shallow water was no longer beneficial to your growth as a swimmer, and honestly, it wasn't even fun. In the shallow water of the wading pool there were no cannon balls, no Marco, no Polo, no contests to see who could tread water the longest, and no need to take a deep breath so that you could swim to the bottom to retrieve something your friend threw in the water.

The wading pool is no place for a mature swimmer, and I would suggest that the Gospel of our Lord calls us out of the shallows, and *into the deep* and mysterious waters of the fullness of the Christian faith. Our Scripture reading this morning paints a vivid picture of Jesus standing by the Sea of Galilee, and the crowd is pressing upon Him to hear the word of God. Luke tells us that Jesus “*saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship*” (Luke 5:2-3). Can you picture it? Here you have our Almighty and Triune God, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word which spoke heaven and earth into existence (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6), sitting in a boat in shallow water sharing the life-saving, life-giving message of His Gospel. Jesus speaks to the crowd in shallow water, like a parent taking their toddler by the hand and leading them to the peaceful, shallow water of the wading pool. This is where it all begins, by the grace of God, through faith, the Good Shepherd takes us by His nail-scarred hand, leads us beside still waters, to the end that we may be washed by His most precious Blood, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23).

This is the beginning, the foundation, the cornerstone of larger life, and yet it's only the beginning. When Jesus had finished speaking to the crowd in shallow water, He switched gears, He turned His attention to Peter and spoke in a different way when He said, “*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught*” (Luke 5:4). You see, Peter had the foundation. He had already met Jesus in the shallow water. His brother, St. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and came to faith in Christ when John identified our Lord as “*The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29, 36). Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus, and now, shortly after the day they met (John 1:42), Jesus is calling Peter to a deeper faith and a closer form of discipleship. No longer will his focus and affection be set on the ordinary duties this earth, but on things above (Colossians 3:2). Jesus is calling Peter *into the deep*. He is calling Peter to take up his cross, and on this

day he will forsake all to follow Him (Luke 5:11).

If you've been a Christian for more than a week or two, there is a lesson to be learned in this passage. So often, by the grace of God, we come to faith in Christ in peaceful, shallow water. At that time, we are similar to the way St. Paul describes the Corinthians: "*babes in Christ... fed with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). The simple truth of the Gospel, when spoken in plain language, is like mother's milk to a newborn baby. It is not only the perfect food, it's the only food that we can process. This is the food that nourishes, strengthens, and helps us grow teeth to the end that we may sink those teeth into solid food and grow out of infancy, for the day comes when every child must stop clinging to its mother. The day comes when every child should leave the shallow water of the wading pool and *launch out into the deep*.

It's true that there are people in our society who are content to cling to their mother. There are people that choose to never leave the security of the shallow water, but I don't see that type of person here. What I see when I look around this room are people who are not content to be fed with milk forever. I see hard-working people who work for the best companies. I see college graduates, successful businesspeople, managers, people who have money in the bank, who live in beautiful houses, who drive nice cars and big trucks. I see people who aren't willing to spend the less important parts of their lives in the wading pool. So, we must all be sure that we are not spending our spiritual lives in water that is below our knees. Jesus is calling us *into the deep*. We cannot be people who are willing to take great risks and reap the rewards socially, professionally, and financially, but who settle for rolling up our pants just above the knee and spend our spiritual lives wading around in shallow water. I mean, if we truly believe the words of Holy Scripture, which declare the truth that Jesus Christ loves us and gave Himself up for us (Ephesians 5:2), doesn't it follow that our spiritual growth would be our first priority and our faith in Christ would be the driving force and foundation of everything we are, and everything we do?

Consider the example of St. Peter. When Jesus tells Him: “*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught,*” Peter responds, “*Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net*” (Luke 5:5). When we consider Peter’s response to Jesus’ invitation to deeper faith and closer discipleship, it’s important to note that in many ways Peter’s life was not so different than yours or mine. In the verses that precede our Gospel reading, we get a glimpse into his life when we read that Jesus “*entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her*” (Luke 4:38-39). So, we see that at the least, Peter had a wife and a mother-in-law living under his roof. He had family members that depended on him, and as a professional fisherman, he had business partners that depended on him. He worked all night and spent time during the day maintaining his boat and nets. It’s clear that between work and family Peter had a full plate, and therefore when Jesus called him to launch into the depths of spiritual life, Peter had every earthly reason to say no, but he didn’t. Peter didn’t allow his busy life to get in the way of his love for, and his obedience to, the Son of God. Peter wasn’t content to stay in the shallow water. He didn’t sacrifice his spiritual growth because he had a demanding work life and a busy personal life, but instead took up his cross and did what he was called to do to draw nearer to God.

If you want to draw nearer to God by taking those steps that lead to a deeper faith and a closer form of discipleship, but like Peter, you have a busy life, I would suggest adding one word to your vocabulary. The word is: *nevertheless*. Peter placed that one word between his objection and his obedience when he said, “*Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*” From his limited perspective, Peter had a valid objection, nevertheless, God is God and we are not. We cannot allow our spiritual growth to get sidetracked by fatigue or past failure. We can’t let our busy, demanding lives keep us in a spiritual wading pool. We, like Peter, must obediently launch out into the deep. So, go ahead and state your objection, take it to the Lord in prayer, and

then as a creature before your Creator obediently say, nevertheless at thy word I will launch out into the deep, forsaking all to follow You.