

7.17.2022 Trinity 5 (1 Peter 3:8-15)

A few weeks ago, a 25 year-old Team USA Artistic swimmer and two-time Olympian named Anita Alvarez, lost consciousness and sank to the bottom of the pool after completing her routine at the world aquatics championships. Fortunately, this story that could've ended so tragically, has a happy conclusion. Anita's coach, who won four Olympic medals for Spain, realized what was happening, quickly plunged into the water, and swam to the bottom of the pool to save the life of her swimmer.

When I read this story, I was reminded of this often used expression in sports: "Leave it all on the field." This saying, as I'm sure you know, encourages an athlete to give everything they have right up until the end. No athlete wants to look back after the game, routine, or match and think, I could have done more. Clearly, Anita Alvarez is the kind of competitor who leaves it all in the pool, and when I considered her story, I couldn't help but ask myself, Am I living like she is competing? If my time here on this earth ended today, could I rest in the arms of my Savior secure in the knowledge that I had given everything I have right up until the end, or would I think I could have, and should have, done more?

Our Gospel reading this morning can be read as a text that challenges Christians to step out in faith, and by the grace of God, give everything we have right up until the end. In this Gospel, St. Luke 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 the 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 spoke to the crowd in peaceful, shallow water. He spoke to people who may have been hearing His message for the first time like a parent would when teaching a young child.

St. Paul wrote about speaking to the Corinthians in this way, saying that he had fed them with milk, and not with meat, because they were still *“infants in Christ”* (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’s not only the perfect food, it’s the only food 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, sound teaching and grow out of Christian infancy.

When our Lord spoke to the crowd gathered on the shore He was speaking this way. He was carefully preparing the foundation, He was firmly setting the cornerstone of larger life, but after He spoke to them in that manner, Jesus turned His attention to Peter and spoke to him in a different way, saying, *“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 an intimate, active form of discipleship. He is calling Peter *into the deep*, or in the context of this sermon, our Lord is calling Peter to “leave it all on the field,” to take up his own cross daily (Luke 9:23), and on this day Peter will forsake all to follow Him (Luke 5:11).

*“Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”* The words Jesus spoke to Peter, He speaks to us all. While many of us come to faith in Christ sitting on the shore, listening to our Lord teach us from peaceful, shallow waters, we aren’t meant to remain there. Jesus calls us to step into the water, climb into the boat, and launch out into the deep with Him in order that we may work, and pray, and give everything we have to fill His ships with a miraculous catch, and build His kingdom.

Our Gospel reading this morning can be read as a text that challenges Christians to step out in faith, and by the grace of God, give everything we have right up until the end, and the Epistle can be seen as a letter to guide us, to help us recognize, through the process of self-examination, how we’re progressing in that endeavor. We heard the King James version earlier, now

listen to these verses that describe the way authentic Christians should act, as they're written in the Message translation of the Bible. St. Peter exhorts Christians to *“Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing. Whoever wants to embrace life and see the day fill up with good, Here’s what you do: Say nothing evil or hurtful; Snub evil and cultivate good; run after peace for all you’re worth”* (1 Peter 3:8-12).

Christians who have heard and received our Lord’s call to launch out into the deep with Him live and act this way. We are not yet perfect, but if we have launched out into the depths of the spiritual life with our Lord and Savior our desire is to be agreeable, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble. We, who work with our Lord, know our job is to bless, and therefore every day we strive to say nothing evil or hurtful. We cultivate good, and run after peace with everything we have right up until the end.

The story about Anita Alvarez losing consciousness at the end of her routine, after she had given everything she had right up until the end, should prompt us to ask ourselves: Is this the way we’re living the Christian life? Are we on the sea with our Lord giving everything we have, or are we still standing on the shore? It is a question we must ask, and I pray that by the grace of God may we all be Christians who joyfully step into the water, climb into the boat, and launch out into the deep with our Lord, because it is only with Christ, in Christ, and through Christ that we are able, right up until the end, to be an agreeable, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble blessing to the world God gave the life of His only Son to save.