

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text: Luke 5:1-11

First Corinthians 15:1-11

Isaiah 6:1-13

Date Preached: February 7, 2010

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

One of the things I used to do growing up was go fishing. I remember occasions where I cast the line out and caught fish very quickly. In fact, the very first fish I ever caught was within the first twenty seconds of casting the line. I would later learn that catching fish was not always that easy. There were days when all I did was drown my bait as hour after hour went by without so much as a nibble.

When I think back on those particular days I can emphasize to a point the frustration of Simon Peter and the others in today's Gospel reading. However, that empathy only goes so far. There is a lot at stake for those who make their careers catching fish. Fishing for me was a hobby. Fishing for Peter, and others then and for some people now is a livelihood.

When Jesus encouraged Peter to go out again tired from a night of work that yielded no results, one could hear an element of doubt in Peter's voice. Yet, when Peter and his colleagues caught an abundance

of fish, it was clear that something special was taking place. This wasn't just another day on the job.

Peter recognized in Jesus who at this point he didn't know well that he was someone special. He calls him Lord, a title of respect, a title that acknowledges one in authority. He says to Jesus, "I am a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself." That is how it reads in Eugene Peterson's translation and paraphrase "The Message".

Jesus response to Peter is one that many of us may have heard before. The old King James reads, "Be not afraid, for I will make you fishers of men." Men, in this case is the older reference meaning all people.

One of the things we may not realize is that this commission to go fishing is not limited to Peter. This is the joyful rewarding task of the whole Church. All of us with our varied talents are the fishermen of today.

The church has a lot of messages and biblical mandates that express this reality that can be found in the concluding chapter of each Gospel.

This is the purpose of the church. This is why we exist here on the hill. Our purpose is not to serve

ourselves. Our purpose is to take what God has entrusted to us, specifically the gift of eternal life and use that gift to go fishing. Take this eternal food and share it with those who are hungry for meaning.

In today's world there is a lot that can discourage us from this task. Some days when we go fishing people are not going to bite. We may have doubts about our ability to fish this good news of Jesus.

To these concerns God is clear. One is that we have everything we need to go fishing. We have the good news that comforts weary souls. We have the good news of Jesus that soothes fears. We have the good news of Jesus who says to all people, you belong.

The second point God makes is that our chance of sharing the good news is zero if we don't even try. Now if we don't, God will find others to do the fishing and we may not like what that means. Not only will we miss out on the joy of being part of God's work, but our own fellowship will suffer.

This is not a task we hand over to a committee. Right now we do not have an active Evangelism Committee. It would be great if we did. And with due respect to those who have served on that committee in the past, there are churches that thrive

without one. Those churches that thrive do so because all the members go fishing.

As you go fishing know that you have the help of the church, just as Peter had the help of others in the other boat to come and help. Together as the church, we teach the Scriptures, we support each other in life's joys and difficulties, we tend to the needs of the poor with collections of soup to stock our pantry, we visit those in need and we let our faith take action.

God's grace is at work in you. The result of that grace is in hearing and believing. Such believing may not be instantaneous.

Our fishing endeavors may take many a visit or conversation. Yet know that in this ministry we are called to do, we are not left to our own. God is with us. God is calling us. God is given us all we need, the equipment and tools that are necessary.

What is left to do? Happy fishing.