

## 06 February 2022—The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany 5: Luke 5 1-11

*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.* The story of Jesus calling the Disciples to a miraculous catch of fish tells us who Jesus is, and our work as Jesus-followers.

Luke writes: people were *pressing in...to hear the Word of God*. The desire for relationship with God is at the center of being human. Our vocation is to live the Good News of Jesus in ways that reveal the irresistible beauty of the Gospel. Of course, we cannot share what we do not have. Catching people for Christ begins with our desire to know and be known by God; living authenticity so others want to join us.

Jesus spoke from Simon's boat. The boat has symbolized the Church from early times. God calls the Church to be the specific vessel of God's revelation in Jesus. A boat always tied to the dock is useless. We are to go where the catch might be caught, out into the rough waters of human life. We are to be converted so that we are of maximum service for others' transformation into Christ. The Church exists to share the joy of Christ with everyone and anyone, anywhere and everywhere.

The disciples worked all night, without result. By responding to Jesus' invitation and guidance, they caught a great catch. We, too, must listen for Jesus' guidance and respond with action. Discussion and discernment are necessary, yet we can become trapped in "analysis-paralysis." Our mission is not theoretical but practical. What is God calling us to do and how may we do it?

The catch is extravagant—nets bursting, boats swamping. Of course, a sinking boat is not a place of safety, and that is surely one of the implications of the story. We are not called to feel secure: we are called to give our lives in service of Jesus, trusting him in all things: Christ is our true security. We are called to want and work for God's will for us and for all.

Jesus said: *Do not be afraid...* Fear holds us back: fear of the future, of change, of failure, of God's purpose for us. Why fear catching people for Christ? Because sharing one's life in Christ involves focused energy, continual risk, and great personal commitment. Fear debilitates. There are antidotes for our fear: The more we desire God's will, the more fear fades; the more we want to see God's will working in others, the less fear we know; the more we do our parts to live the will of God in our relationships and environments, the more we will be filled with supernatural courage. Have no fear, even when you are afraid: As we follow Jesus, God will give us everything we need for every ministry to which God calls us and that we are willing to accept.

Jesus-followers are people of action. Here are five quick foundations for Christian action. First, pray; CS Lewis wrote, the less we pray, the worse it goes. Intentional prayer three times daily is normative: morning, evening and before retiring. We have a tremendous resource in the Book of Common Prayer which provides such prayer.

Worship is another foundation. Being here is elementary, but so too is meaningful preparation for, attentiveness during, and thanksgiving after worship. In Lent I will focus on the what, why, and how of our liturgy.

Friendship is crucially important; I use the term 'friendship' intentionally because what is required is more than friendliness. We are to welcome others not into the pews but into lives, making room for them in our affections. We are to welcome people into Church as we welcome people into our homes—not for ulterior motives, not as a social nicety but to build and strengthen bonds of friendship. We are to offer what the world so desperately needs: the experience and joy of belonging. We are to treat everyone like they belong, before they belong, until they belong.

A fourth foundation is Gratitude, not as theory but practice. Each day thank God as your first conscious act; and habitually give thanks for God's grace and blessing.

Finally, practice joy. 'Cranky-Christian, pessimistic-Christian, sullen-Christian' are oxymorons. If we are not prayer-filled, worship-centered, friendship-offering, gratitude-consumed Jesus-followers why would anyone want to join us? Following Jesus brings joy, and we are the living proof. As we prayed a few weeks ago, we ask God that we may *shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth*. (BCP pg. 215; Collect for Epiphany 2). Loving-kind God write this prayer on our hearts and help us to live it with gratitude and joy, that many will be caught in the net of your love.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.