

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Book of Judges.⁴

“And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah [**AHFF-ruh**], that pertained unto Joash [**JOE-ash**] the Abiezrite [**AY-buy-EZZ-right**]: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites [**MIDD-ee-unn-ights**]. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites [**MIDD-ee-unn-ights**]. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites [**MIDD-ee-unn-ights**]: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh [**muh-NASS-uh**], and I am the least in my father’s house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites [**MIDD-ee-unn-ights**] as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew [**SHOW**] me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

“And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah⁵ [**EE-fuh**] of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

“Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁶

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret [**geh-NESS-uh-rett**], And 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. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught [**DRAFT**]. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught [**DRAFT**] of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee [**ZEBB-uh-dee**], which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from hence-

fish obey Him, he realized that he himself should as well. That was the sin he confessed.

As we prepare our hearts to receive Christ’s real, tangible, broken flesh in the sacred mystery of the Most Blessed Sacrament, let us with all consciousness kneel down to receive not only the grace in which it bestows, but the Character and Nature of Him Who we receive. Let us, like Simon Peter, confess our unbelief so that we too can arise and walk out the doors of this Church, and effectively become true fishers of men, not with words only, but with a life surrendered to the passionate pursuit of the persona of Christ. And then we will begin to see the increase.

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The Rev’d J. Steven Victory⁹
July 7, 2012

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fifth Sunday after Easter, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Judges 6:11-23 (KJV).

⁵ Just over two and a half pecks in our measure.

⁶ Luke 5:1-11 (KJV).

⁷ 1 Peter 3:8-15a.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Rector, The Anglican Church of St. Charles King and Martyr (APCK), Huntsville, AL.

But it was only when they bowed to our Lord's will that they began to see the fruits of their labor. They realized that, outside of that will, they could not perform the task at hand in their own strength, even though they had been doing this their whole lives. We who have been blessed to be raised in the Church, or even been a part of the Church for any amount of time, sometimes get complacent in our passionate pursuit in becoming the *persona* of Jesus Christ. And that is the will of the Father for any Christian, to become more like His Son. God does not want to see Fr. Steve, or David, or Bill, or Richard or (*place your own name here*), when He looks at us. He longs to see His Son, a resemblance that will only come if we remain in that passionate pursuit of His persona.

And what is this passionate pursuit? It is internalizing what we find in the passage from St. Peter to which I already referred.⁸ Not only internalizing it, but acting upon it and living it out in our everyday lives, in every circumstance, in every situation, whether people surround you, or you're all alone. But it can't be strictly out of blind obedience or of obligation, only out of a broken and contrite heart, which is consumed by the love of God.

And when our hearts and lives, fit this mold of God's will, then we can effectively go out and begin casting our nets into the deep again, and see the Hand of God begin to multiply and increase our efforts in the Church's mission to seek and save the lost. We will then see that the four walls of this building will not be able to handle the increase, just as the boats began to sink within the text which we read in the Second Lesson.

And just as Simon Peter threw himself at the feet of Jesus, and confessed his sin, Christ is giving us the same opportunity to do likewise. What Peter's sin was in our Second Lesson is our sin as well. And that is the sin of unbelief: not believing in His sacred Will, questioning the very Word of God spoken from the Source of Life. And when Peter realized that even the

forth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, ✠ and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

When we are introduced to Scripture study, we learn that we have to look past the literal sense of the passages given, and begin to start reading the sacred Scriptures with a new meaning, a new understanding, and begin to try and listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling us through the words. This type of reading is what we call reading within the spiritual sense.

Now, don't misinterpret this as a personal or private interpretation, which is what 2 Peter 1:20 specifically speaks against. Instead, we rely on the same Holy Spirit that wrote the letter of the text, through prayer and contemplation, to illuminate and speak to our souls. Always remember that what we believe the Holy Spirit is showing us in the sacred text must always align with that which has been taught and perpetuated by the Fathers of the Church from the most ancient of times.

In his First Epistle General,⁷ St. Peter gives us an exhortation about how we are to present ourselves as Christians to a fallen humanity. He tells us to be of one mind, as the Church should be. We should all be united in faith, values, mission, and prayer. It is a travesty that we can go into any town or municipality and see every flavor of "churchianity" on every street corner. Every denomination has its own principles of faith, values, mission, and prayer. Some are biblical and some fail miserably in maintaining a biblical point of view of the Church and the world.

And it's no wonder why we have become so ineffective in spreading the Gospel, because these divisions create this sense of religious chaos, as we mentioned last week, with which those outside of sanctifying grace want nothing to do. They are already living in brokenness and despair and all they see in us is a group of people proclaiming truth and righteousness while being broken and distrustful of their fellow Christian brethren.

And so, St. Peter continues to tell us, being of one mind means having compassion on one another, loving as brethren, being full of pity and courtesy, not rendering evil for evil. He then speaks a truth that most Christians either cannot, or will not, embrace. And that is to love life.

Now loving life doesn't just mean to love the good times when we see God's blessings flowing freely within our lives, but also when we see that somehow we've entered into the dark night of the soul. For most of us, it is easy to raise our hands in thanksgiving when everything around us seems to be going our way, but hang our heads when life seems to have dealt us hardship.

We have to embrace the entirety of life and love it. Christ, through His passion, gave us a way to freely offer up our thanks to the Father, knowing that unashamedly we can enter into His courts with praise and thanksgiving. But through that same Passion, He gave us a perfect example of how to pick up our own crosses, embrace them, and offer them up in sacrifice, uniting them to His suffering. If God can't be God in the bad times, then there is no reason for Him to be God in the good ones.

And when we embrace life, it has an effect on our outlook, and the way we deal with others. We will not speak guile, we will eschew evil, and do good. We will speak peace, and ensue it. Righteousness is not just a matter of performing spe-

cific actions or fulfilling the law, but it is a matter of the heart. And when we embrace the life God gave us, then we will embrace the One Who breathed life into existence, and begin to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.

And then, in a peculiar way, we read the Second Lesson today. In the literal sense we see the miracle of Jesus, telling Simon Peter, James, and John to cast their nets out again after a long night of fishing without success. We know that they obeyed Him and they saw that everything that has a name, must bow to the will of God, even the tiniest of fish. And they caught so many that their boats began to sink. Simon Peter, then, threw himself down before Jesus and confessed his sin, and stood up as a disciple, a fisher of men.

But within the spiritual sense we must understand this truth. When the people saw God the Son, they pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God, while, of course, He is the Word of God Incarnate. And so it is with us in the world. When people see Christ in us, fallen humanity will begin to flock to us, because they see the living truth lived out in each individual believer's life. They will begin to see and understand by our living example, that greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the World.

But outside of St. Peter's exhortation, we are like those who have gone fishing all night without fruit from their labors. While we speak His name with our lips, our hearts are far from Him, so the effectiveness of reaching a dying world with the cause of the Gospel is without fruition. We become as the Pharisees and the Sadducees who held to the letter of the law, were righteous on the outside, who publicly prayed so that everyone could hear them, yet would stone the sinner without compassion, and miss the chance of knowing the promised Messiah, while staring at Him face to face.