

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

The Fifth Sunday After Trinity

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

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

“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 ephah^{iv} [**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.^v

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

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing!*

But at your word I will let down the nets.’ And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But 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 catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James, and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.’ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”^{vi}

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Homily:

Fishing is almost universal in its appeal. Every society on Earth has had fishermen, and they have always been depended upon to feed the masses and provide honest labor. Whether fishing in fresh or salt water, those who seek the bounty of the seas, braving wind, water and weather, have always held a special place in our history, our lore, and our hearts.

Fishing appeals to our basic instincts to work, to feed ourselves and our families and to deal directly with nature. The fish of the sea, like the rest of creation, were given to us for our use and enjoyment. In Genesis, God granted to mankind dominion over the fish and all other living things that move on Earth.^{vii}

Fishing is, of course, dangerous, physically challenging work. It exposes the fisherman to hardships and hazards, including being wet and cold, fatigue and wearying labor, sometimes fishing at night. It requires knowledge of the sea, and of the fish being sought. To be successful, one must understand tides, currents, feeding patterns and many other things. Working fishermen, generally, are not wealthy. They are a hard-working and hearty lot, “rough-hewn” as it is said.

Consider that several of the most popular television shows in the last few years all center around the life of fishermen. One involves fishing for crabs in the Bering Sea, one the search for swordfish in the north Atlantic, one the hunt for shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico, and yet another, fishing for alligator.

It was from the ranks of fishermen that our Lord found His first disciples. Peter, James, Andrew and John all were fishermen. These men were not wealthy, nor well educated, but were men of labor and business. Our Lord did not despise them for their lack of money, or status, but honored their honest hard work and skills.

(A subtext in today's Gospel account is that three of these four men, the first of the Apostles whom our Lord called to Himself, thereafter formed an inner circle within the larger body of the Twelve. Thus, for example, it was Peter, James, and John who accompanied our Lord to witness His Transfiguration.)

Christ called these to be His Apostles: *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* In order to follow our Lord, however, they had to leave behind their former calling. They would henceforth use all the skills they possessed to "catch" men instead of fish. What had formerly been nets of string, knots and rope would now be nets of words, actions and spirit.

So, just as shepherding gave the Church one of its most enduring images for the cure of souls—"pastor" literally means "one who cares for a flock of animals"—fishing, thanks to today's Gospel passage, gave that same Church one of its most basic metaphors for evangelism.

Just before our Lord commanded His followers to fish again, He had been speaking to the assembled crowd from a boat. The crowd was large and pressed around Him, so that He could not, perhaps, be seen by the crowd just standing around Him. He therefore sat in a boat, and had it moved just offshore, and spoke to the gathered crowd from there. At the conclusion of His preaching, our Lord ordered Peter to take his boat out again into the deeper waters and let down his nets.

As John, James and Peter then caught fish with their nets, Christ was fishing for souls with His words and message. He would teach His disciples to do the very same thing. Jesus fishes for souls not to destroy them, but to save them by bringing them home to God. Christ bestowed on the fishermen—and on us—the commission of fishing for men instead of fish.

In order to accept this commission, the fishermen had to leave behind their former lives and follow Christ. It is no different with us. We too must leave behind our former dedication to the ways of man and the world to take up instead the ministry of God.

The fishermen turned from fishing for profit, honor and personal benefit to fishing for souls to provide nourishment for those souls. The labor of those called thereby provides nourishment for the rest of the Church. We in turn find we must turn from focusing on the glory of the world, the honor of men and the false benefits of worldly pursuits to the eternal benefits of the service of God.

“Follow me,” our Lord said to the fishermen. It is a direct, a sudden change of direction for which He calls. Quit following the ways of the world and instead follow Me. Be diligent and humble in your attendance to Christ. Learn of Him and then carry what you learn to others.

If we are to fish for men, we must follow Christ and do as He did.

How successful was this dramatic and amazing call? We are told that Peter and Andrew immediately left their boats and their father Zebedee and followed Christ. James and John, too, left the nets they were repairing and followed Christ.^{viii} Not that they would never fish again—for they assuredly would—but never again would they be fishers by profession. From this point on, they would be fishers of men in the employ of God.

They would be greatly challenged in the future, but they would find their assurance and security in the Lord. They learned to trust implicitly the word of Jesus.

When our Lord had finished teaching the large crowd gathered to hear Him, He ordered Peter to go back into the lake and lower his nets. Even though he had fished all night with no success, Peter responded, *“Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”* Rather than trusting in his own knowledge and experience of fishing, and aching muscles from fishing without result all night, Peter agrees to drop his nets simply because Jesus asks him to.

Now anyone who has gone fishing and failed to even get a nibble knows how frustrating it is to see someone else come to the very same spot and start catching fish.

But this new fisherman was not just any man. *“And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.”* Not that their nets actually broke, but they were filled to the straining point of breaking. The nets were so full, we are told, that Peter was required to call his partners out to assist him in another boat, and even then the boats were so full as nearly to sink.

In the same way, if we are faithful followers of our Lord, fishing for men as He calls us to, our take will be mighty. We can bring to God so many followers as to seemingly strain the nets of our fishing, yet successfully land them with the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord, as You have called us to be fishers of men, so guide us in our efforts that we bring to You all those You would have us bring. As You guided Peter to drop his nets where they would be most effective, so guide us to be your net where we can be most effective. Let us fill Your Church with joyful worshipers. This we ask for Your name's sake. *Amen.*

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW^{ix}
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ⁱ “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).

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

ⁱⁱⁱ *Judges 6:11-23* (KJV).

^{iv} *Just over two and a half pecks in our measure.*

^v *Luke 5:1-11* (KJV).

^{vi} *Luke 5:4-11* (RSV).

^{vii} *Genesis 1:28* (RSV).

^{viii} *Matthew 4:20* (RSV).

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