

Liturgical Day: The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Date: February 4, 2007

Sermon Title: The Heart of a Christian's Life

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dad and I used to fish when I was a kid. I'll never forget those mornings – magical mornings in my memory now. He'd come into my room before sunup and wake me. We'd sit down for a quick bowl of cereal in the kitchen, and then climb into the car. The night before he would already have loaded Grandpa's old *Johnson Seahorse 5* outboard motor and our fishing gear in the trunk. We'd head off to some small Minnesota lake, rent a boat, load our gear into it, and put out into the water just about the time the sky started to lighten up. We'd sit in that boat for hours, hanging our lines over the side, talking about this and that, and sometimes just sitting together in quiet. It was a magical time: just Dad and me and a lake full of fish. (Problem is, by the time we loaded our equipment back into the car, there were usually just as many fish in the lake as when we showed up. Neither of us ever set any records for catching fish. That didn't matter, though: the magic had to do with being together – not with catching a creel full of fish.)

Years later, a friend of mine in Phoenix convinced me to go on a fly-fishing trip with him to Lee's Ferry on the Colorado river. I had never fly fished before, but I had inherited Grandpa's old fiberglass fly rod, and thought that since I had the equipment, I should try using it some time. We made the six-hour pilgrimage to Marble Canyon, camped overnight, and got up first thing in the morning to go fishing. It was a fascinating experience: wading waste deep in that powerful river, drifting a fly through pockets made by boulders, and watching as the more experienced casters landed fish after fish. By late morning, I was having fun, but still hadn't caught a fish. All of a sudden the fly disappeared, I raised the rod, and I had my first fish on. It was a 17" rainbow trout, full of spunk. I held on for dear life, and saw the fish come racing to the surface, and jump up out of the water, flying through the air. Three times that fish took to flight.

In that moment, I was hooked. I knew I would never again be happy just sitting in a boat watching a bobber like Dad and I had done years earlier. It would be a long time before I would ever be any good at it, but from that moment on, I was a fly fisherman. It's funny how a profound moment like that can change your life.

This morning I'm thinking about another fisherman: a guy named Simon Peter, after whom our church is named. Simon had been up fishing all night, with no success. Of course, his experience of fishing was much different than mine. He wasn't out in the boat, relishing some one-on-one time with his dad. He was working day after day to provide for his family: Simon was a professional fisherman. He had just experienced a terrible night – hours and hours of throwing and hauling and emptying nets, with no success at all. He was probably dreading the walk back to his home, after the equipment was made ready for the next day. He was probably dreading the question that always greeted him at the door, "How did you do last night?" He was probably bone-tired, and discouraged, and painfully aware that too many nights in a row like this last one could be the ruin of him – and of his family.

And then that rabbi showed up again. The one who had healed Simon's mother-in-law. The one everybody seemed to be talking about. The one who taught in the synagogues, and worked miracles in the streets. Jesus showed up, and used Simon's boat as a pulpit. When Jesus was finished teaching, he asked Simon to put out a bit

FIRST LESSON
ISAIAH 6:1-8 [9-13]

PSALM
PSALM 138

SECOND LESSON
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

GOSPEL LESSON
LUKE 5:1-11

PRAYER OF THE DAY

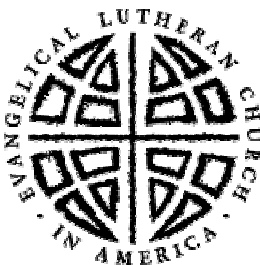
MOST HOLY GOD, THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH YOUR GLORY, AND BEFORE YOU ANGELS AND SAINTS STAND IN AWE. ENLARGE OUR VISION TO SEE YOUR POWER AT WORK IN THE WORLD, AND BY YOUR GRACE MAKE US HERALDS OF YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND LORD. AMEN.

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farther into the water. Reluctantly, Simon did. Jesus then asked him to throw his net over the side. Simon protested at first, knowing that if they couldn't catch anything at night when the fishing was best, there wasn't much chance of them doing any better during the day, when the nets were more likely to scare the fish than catch them. But because it was Jesus who told him to do it, he threw the net over the side, and it was incredible. The nets were bursting at the seams. The boats were sinking. It was all they could do to haul the fish on board.

In that moment, Peter was changed. He knew he would never be happy again just working as a fisherman. It would be a long time before he would really understand what had captured his heart – but from that time on he was a follower of Jesus. When Jesus said, "From now on you will be catching people" he wasn't inviting Peter to come and follow him. He was describing what had already happened to him. Peter had a glimpse of what being in the presence of Jesus would be like, and it changed him profoundly. A miracle took place that day, and it had little to do with fish. It had to do with a simple fisherman being touched at the very center of who he was. It had to do with a man being so affected by Jesus that there was nothing else to do than leave it all behind, and follow wherever Jesus would go. This isn't a fish story: it is a faith story. At its center stands the faith of Simon Peter, and the difference that faith would make in his life.

Peter's experience of coming to faith was a dramatic one. And I know that some of you have dramatic stories about how you came to faith. Times of personal crisis. Mystical moments of being aware of God's presence. Experiences of healing or renewal that are attributed to God's touch.

Others of you have quieter stories – stories that don't include a radical one-time change in direction, but stories that indicate God's shepherding influence that, over the course of a lifetime, has brought you to where you are now. Parents and grandparents help us to grow into an awareness of what it means to be a child of God – an awareness that deepens and strengthens year after year. There may not be one specific moment in time when we can point to a distinct transition from unbeliever to believer – but the growth is there, and the transformation has taken place, even if it has happened over the course of many years.

There are *many and various ways* that God can enter a believer's life. Our faith proclaims a radically creative and adaptive God. One who is able to work through the dramatic conversion as well as the faithful witness of family and friends to bring people to faith.

That's where the miracle was on the day when Jesus led Simon to that great catch of fish. Not that the nets nearly broke and the boats nearly sank. Not even that Simon was so stunned that he dropped to his knees and worshipped Jesus. If the story had ended there, it wouldn't have been much of a miracle. It would have been an interesting moment, but without much lasting significance. The miracle was that this experience made such a difference in Simon's life. A difference that would compel Simon to become one of Jesus' followers. A difference that would set him on an entirely new course in life. A difference that would fill him with a passion to make the same kind of difference in other people's lives that had been made in his.

This morning's lesson gets after the central purpose of being a follower of Jesus Christ. We, like Simon, have been entrusted with a great treasure: the treasure of the Gospel – the good news that God loves us enough to die for us, and gives us the gift of eternal life. Our call is to share that treasure with the world.

I had the chance to visit with a friend of mine some time ago: a Pastor who is nearing retirement. While we were visiting, someone asked him, "What does retirement mean to you?" His response was interesting. He asked, "What is our purpose in life?" After stammering for a response, the questioner responded with Matthew 28: "To make disciples." "That's close," he said. "But actually, we are called to make disciples who make disciples. I might be retiring, and I might no longer draw a full time paycheck from my congregation. But I am still called to make disciples who make disciples of others. And I'll still spend most of my energy trying to discover how I can continue that work in my life – even if it's no longer my official responsibility as a Pastor." ⁱ

Translated into the terms of this morning's lesson: our central purpose is to catch people who catch people. Whether our faith story includes a dramatic turn towards God or a gradual growth in grace makes no

ⁱ Pastor Bruce Herman (Senior Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Golden, Colorado), at the Rocky Mountain Synod Theological Conference in Estes Park, reflecting on his plans to retire from full time ministry.

difference. What matters is that God's touch in our life has moved us and inspired us to join Peter and the many others throughout the centuries who have been so deeply and profoundly touched by God's grace, that they have invested their lives in sharing the good news with others. May we be touched as deeply and profoundly as they were. And may our life and witness help lead others to faith in Christ.

Let me leave with you with these two questions:

QUESTION OF THE DAY:

Who has shared their faith with you, in a way that has made a difference for your faith?

With whom will you commit to sharing your faith, this week, seeking to make a difference in their life?

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (February 4, 2007)

English Text: ⁱⁱ

^{5.1} Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. ⁱⁱⁱ

Greek Text:

^{5.1} Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ τὸν ὄχλον ἐπικεῖσθαι αὐτῷ καὶ ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ἐστῶς παρὰ τὴν λίμνην Γεννησαρέτ ²καὶ εἶδεν δύο πλοῖα ἐστῶτα παρὰ τὴν λίμνην· οἱ δὲ ἀλιεῖς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀποβάαντες ἔπλυνον τὰ δίκτυα. ³Ἐμβὰς δὲ εἰς ἓν τῶν πλοίων, ὃ ἦν Σίμωνος, ἠρώτησεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐπαναγαγεῖν ὀλίγον· καθίσας δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου ἐδίδασκεν τοὺς ὄχλους. ⁴Ὡς δὲ ἐπαύσατο λαλῶν, εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Σίμωνα· ἐπανάγαγε εἰς τὸ βάθος καὶ χαλάσατε τὰ δίκτυα ὑμῶν εἰς ἄγραν. ⁵καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς Σίμων εἶπεν· ἐπιστάτα, δι' ὅλης νυκτὸς κοπιᾶσαντες οὐδὲν ἐλάβομεν· ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ ῥήματι σου χαλάσω τὰ δίκτυα. ⁶καὶ τοῦτο ποιήσαντες συνέκλεισαν πλῆθος ἰχθύων πολὺ, διερρήσσετο δὲ τὰ δίκτυα αὐτῶν. ⁷καὶ κατένευσαν τοῖς μετόχοις ἐν τῷ ἑτέρῳ πλοίῳ τοῦ ἐλθόντας συλλαβέσθαι αὐτοῖς· καὶ ἦλθον καὶ ἔπλησαν ἀμφότερα τὰ πλοῖα ὥστε βυθίζεσθαι αὐτά. ⁸Ἰδὼν δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος προσέπεσεν τοῖς γόνασιν Ἰησοῦ λέγων· ἔξελθε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἁμαρτωλὸς εἰμι, κύριε. ⁹θάμβος γὰρ περιέσχεν αὐτὸν καὶ πάντας τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἄγρα τῶν ἰχθύων ὧν συνέλαβον, ¹⁰ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην υἱοὺς Ζεβεδαίου, οἳ ἦσαν κοινωνοὶ τῷ Σίμωνι. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Σίμωνα ὁ Ἰησοῦς· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζωογρῶν. ¹¹καὶ καταγαγόντες τὰ πλοῖα ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἀφέντες πάντα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. ^{iv}

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke 5:1-11, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{iv} St. Luke 5:1-11, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.