

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany February 6, 2022- Annual meeting

Luke 5:1-11

Jesus sits (the posture of teaching from the Torah in the synagogue). But he is not in the synagogue. He is in a boat on the sea. A makeshift place. Teaching not from the Torah scroll, but by his own authority.

It raises the question, what does a holy space look like?

- What makes a space holy? Where do we encounter Jesus and his teaching? In Matthew, Jesus says where two or more are gathered in his name, there he is. The gospels always show Jesus on the move, among the people. The important thing is not the space, the holy thing is not the building, but the people. Followers of Jesus, gathered. Around his Word and receiving his Sacraments.
- Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God is not bound to this place. The Spirit is active in the world, right now. Out among you all.
- What might it mean to think of our worship, our encounter of Jesus, of the holy, as something that can and does happen out beyond these four walls?

Another question that this text raises is, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

- **Listen.** Listen to Jesus even when it goes against our own knowledge through experience. Peter and his crew would have been fishing all night in the sea. They did this because the type of nets they used would be visible to the fish in the sunlight. After a long night of hard work, they caught, bupkis. Now, they are cleaning the nets, washing them out, mending them,

laying them out to dry. Then home to get some rest before doing it again. Then this rabbi comes along and interrupts their work so he can teach all these people without getting squished. But Peter and his crew accommodate him. Then, instead of allowing them to get on with their tasks, this carpenter tries to tell them their jobs. “Go out into the deep water and drop your nets.” Peter points out, “we’ve worked ourselves to exhaustion and caught nothing, it’s not the right time of day for the equipment we have, but okay.” Peter listens to Jesus, does what he asks, even when Peter knows as an experienced fisherman, it will be a fruitless waste of time, energy, and resources. Listen to Jesus.

- **Acknowledge our reality (I am a sinner).** When Peter is confronted with the reality that Jesus is something different, he falls to his knees and begs Jesus to go away from him, “I am a sinful man!” The word Peter uses for sin is an archery term, it means to miss the mark. “Go away from me, Lord for I miss the mark in my life. I am a mess.” He speaks the truth. He is a mess. We are all a mess. We are all sinners. We all miss the mark of who we are called to be as followers of Jesus and the sooner we acknowledge that, name that reality to ourselves and confess that reality to Jesus, the sooner Jesus can equip us to fish for people. Because...
- **When we acknowledge our reality (we’re a mess), when we listen to what Jesus says (even when it sounds like a fruitless waste of time, energy, and resources) when get out of the way, Jesus can do great things, even through messy us.** An abundant catch of fish (enough to almost sink two boats), three thousand joining the church in one day in Acts, taking a small group of disciples and believers and growing it into the largest religion in

the world. When we listen, when we acknowledge the reality of who we are as messy people, God in Jesus will do amazing things through us.

What is it God in Jesus is calling us to, now? Here at St. John?

- **We have weathered a storm.** These past two plus years of pandemic have been a storm that has beached many other ships, congregations in our own area and across our state and the nation. This storm of the pandemic has accelerated trends that already existed. I'm convinced there will be fewer Lutheran congregations in the Cedar Rapids area by the end of 2022 than at the beginning. But we won't be one of them. Thanks be to God!
 - As we'll see in just a bit, we ended last year in a strong financial position.
 - As we've seen already and will continue to see in our videos, we have been active over the past year in Growing. In faith towards God, Love to one another, and Generosity to all.
 - The seas are still choppy, but fairer weather is ahead.
- **After this time, we may all feel a bit like Peter, we've been working hard and don't see any results.** Is this purely because of the storm of the last few years that has battered and bruised us? Or does this mean we haven't been fishing in the right place? That we haven't gone out far enough, into the deep water?
- **I would invite us, in this year of 2022, first to give thanks to God for all that God has done to help us as individuals and a community of faith to weather these past two years.** Give thanks, for the gifts of technological skill and ingenuity that made our move to online worship at the beginning

of the pandemic possible almost instantaneously. I give thanks to God for Tina Elwood-Gehrke in particular, who was a constant presence at all our worship services those first months, for my wife Karen who ran the PowerPoint week after week. For Debbie who went with the flow. I give thanks for Terry Ard and his gifts that helped us make the move to the next level of broadcasting and improved, both in quality and ease, how we kept assembling around Word and Sacrament online. I give thanks for our leadership - for Guy Schultz and Cindy Engler our Presidents who each brought different gifts to the table as we made hard decisions, navigated troubled waters, and with God's help, came out the other side. I am thankful for our Finance Committee and Councils who worked hard during the pandemic to get us to a better place financially. I give thanks for each of you; who have been willing to live out your faith in new ways, who have adapted to online, and outside, and masked. Who have offered of yourselves to host worship, provide food and fellowship. To gather food for others, given so folks could have Christmas. Who have generously supported the Mission and Ministry of St. John. I would invite us to give thanks to the God who gave us all these resources of people, talents, and funds to weather this storm.

- **I would invite us to spend time listening to Jesus.** To listen anew to the teaching of Jesus through scripture, through a renewal of our prayer life, to consider where God is calling us to be. To listen for how and where we are called to fish. Let us be diligent in our listening and open to the possibility that we will be called into some deep water, to do things we're sure won't

work. But remember what can happen when we do listen to the voice of Jesus. Abundant things.

- **As we give thanks and listen, I would invite us to remember that we exist not for ourselves, for the preservation of this building, but for the life saving proclamation of the good news of God in Jesus Christ that means life for those who believe.** Life fuller and more abundant now, in this time of change and difficulty, but also life age long.

Let us rejoice and give thanks this day, for we have a God whose desire is not to condemn us sinful, messy people. Not to punish us and send us away, but, just like Peter, to call us to follow God's Son, Jesus. To work through us and our messiness to call others to follow- so that all might receive what God has first given us; forgiveness, healing, mercy, and grace. So that all might be blessed. Thanks be to God.