

TRINITY 5

I Peter 3:8ff

Luke 5:1ff

+In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen+

Getting from the place we are to where God wants us to be in life, is never merely about rearranging a few pieces of inner furniture or tweaking our souls to be a bit kinder or gentler. It is about following Jesus wherever he takes us, even into deep water. I think the path of faith is a lot more like an adventure than a fully inclusive vacation with all things predetermined. It is what happens to us and for us when we are met by the grace of Christ and invited to leave behind what robs us of being whole people, fully alive. It can be a daunting journey with turns and twists we cannot see in advance where God waits to surprise us, and so, we are left resting on faith and hope in the One who calls to us to be His.

Years ago we had built a house on a piece of land filled with hickory, oak, and tulip poplar trees. The property had a considerable drop as it was on a hillside that slanted down to a small creek. The result was that the house had a full stand up space on one end. By the time two stories were erected above this and then a full attic overhead the peak reached 30 feet. What was enjoyable was the fact that with a little caution a person could climb out on the roof and view the woods. It was from that vantage point that I witnessed something unusual late one spring day. A pair of hawks had built a nest well up in a tree, and could often be heard calling. As their 2 nestlings grew in stature and hunger the calling often became more vocal. One of those matured and finally began to leave the stick nest. The other, however, clung to secure surroundings and appeared quite content to do so. But one morning things changed; standing on the edge of the nest it called and complained, but resolutely refused to take a leap into midair. It was then that one of the parents, from behind, bumped it unexpectedly and out it went. Guess what happened? It flew!! It was reminiscent of children who see a high diving board from below and climb a ladder to go off only to find things look a lot higher from the end of the board than imagined; but then they trust and leap and life opens to a new chapter. To follow Jesus is much the same. It is moving beyond comfort zones or places we simply stay because we fear the unknown, and going in trust with where he has been and leads.

Today we have another of St. Luke’s stories, many of which are not overtly religious. (think about them—a woman finds a dime, a man gets mugged on the road, a son wants his inheritance) Placed between 2 sets of accounts of healings and powerful actions by Jesus, we hear of a mundane, daily event—people fishing. On first glance, there is the tendency to be drawn to the huge catch of fish, but for Luke that is part and parcel of a great prophet. Far more important and lurking just under the surface, is a deep and powerful encounter that transforms lives. Luke tells this quite differently from Matthew and Mark. In those accounts we get a call to follow him. Here we get a dialogue; a living and personal encounter between Jesus and Peter. But know this; this is not “Once upon a time” in the past removed from us. This is “Once Again in our Time”. In the New Testament when you find Peter, and disciples in a boat it is shorthand for the Church, God’s faithful people that are the topic, and that means YOU and ME!! In this interaction between Peter and Jesus we will find ourselves and our journeys with God being revealed.

These people have come up empty after working all night. They caught nothing for all their effort. Of course. Where in life do we find our own nets empty? When we operate on our own isolated from the source of life; when we are just another benevolent club that seeks to do a little

good here or there; when we replace the core and heart of the message of the faith, that in Jesus God is reversing the apparent decay and death that seems to cling to life with hope and an open future of the resurrection; when the message we put forth is not the message that grace is more powerful than sin, guilt, and discipleship has more future than self-service...then the net is empty, because the message is empty.

Jesus asks Peter (notice he does not speak to others...this is a personal conversation, and it is meant to be heard by us) to put out into the deep. Peter's response could be voiced in contemporary language as: "are you serious? We've been at it and we are beat." Put out into the deep; go where you have not been; explore what I am asking of you, and trust me. So much of life, even our lives, is illusory. We live with the myth that we are fully in control and call the shots, or that we believe what we can see or manipulate, or that our lost hopes and sorrows somehow have the last word and determine how we will live now. My intrepid associate at Twin Lakes is a cyclist, as am I. He rides not only road bikes, but being young he does backwoods, mountain cycling as well, and is quite good at it. However, a couple of months ago he was cruising Western NC when he approached a stream. Spotting a site that looked as if he could ford it without dismounting, he surged forward into the creek. What looked to be a foot or so deep turned out to be about 3-4 feet deep, and he rode up to his chest in water. Appearances can be deceiving; look beneath them. Luke is reminding us that something, or rather someone will command our attention; someone will own us at the deep moments of life; someone will determine what we value and will capture our energies; someone will determine how we step, and how we interpret our pains and losses our hopes and joys, AND what we will offer to everyone who comes in contact with us.

Peter reacts to the surprise of finding the divine in an everyday activity with a sense of awe and holy fear. He knows what has seemed apparent is not the whole story and that in Jesus God has entered his life and it will never be the same. He is told not to fear, for he will now "net living people". He will invite others to discover that in Jesus God is reversing the fatalism and sorrow that overshadows far too many people. Do you recall Mary's words earlier in Luke when she is told she will bear the Messiah? "Nothing will be impossible with God." Peter and his friends discover the same thing in Jesus, and they are willing to leave behind all the things that prevent them from having full and whole lives. What do you need to leave behind in order to be more whole and fully alive? It is terribly easy to settle for less than what God will give us. It is in trust or what we call faith that we begin to stretch out and go where we would not go before with God. Our whole reason for being is to receive full life and invite others to do the same. (zoo/greo) What gets called "fishers of men" in Greek is 'catch what is alive'. We are sustained as God's people when we allow ourselves to go deeper than we have gone, for God is there.

Sir Francis Drake's Prayer:

"Disturb us Lord when we are too well pleased with ourselves. When our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, When we have arrived safely because we sailed too close to shore... Disturb us Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life... We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes, and push us into the future in strength, courage, hope and love. We ask this in the Name of our Captain, who is Jesus Christ. Amen.+