

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Fifth Sunday after Trinity (2021)**

**Called to Call Others**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” . . . And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”” (Luke 5:8–10b, ESV)***

It is always interesting to see the different interpretations of the evangelists regarding the calling of the first apostles. It is easy to recognize the difference between the synoptic gospels and St. John’s gospel. The synoptic writers have the call of the apostles at the sea of Galilee, near Capernaum, while St. John places the event not far from the Jordan. In the synoptics, Jesus finds the brothers St. Peter and St. Andrew in their boat and later finds the other brothers, St. James, and St. John in their father’s boat. While in the Gospel of John, St. Andrew, and tradition says St. John, follow Jesus whom John the Baptist has just identified as the ***“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29, ESV)*** After having spent the day with Jesus, Andrew goes and tells his brother Simon (Peter), ***“We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ).” (John 1:41, ESV)*** So is it any wonder that many angst over this seeming contradiction. But if we spend our time worrying over the difference between the synoptics explanation of the calling of the apostles and St. John explanations of the calling of the apostles, we’ll miss the point of the calling of the apostles.

Whether we like the interpretation of the synoptics or St. John, the importance of these narratives is to show us that it is Jesus who calls, that is chooses, His disciples and why He calls them. Jesus calls His apostles to build His Church. Like the apostles, you, too are called by Jesus. And like the apostles, you are *Called to Call Others* into the church. Having chosen you, He tells you, from now on you will be fishermen of men. You will be sent forth to proclaim His goodness, His love, His compassion, and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for all mankind. He calls you to ***“proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9, ESV)*** Thus, these narratives of the calling of the apostles open your mind to the truth of how you became a disciple of Christ. It is not of your own making, but one only of our Lord Jesus. He calls you; you did not call Him. He tells you, ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.” (John 15:16, ESV)***

Therefore, based on the Gospel Reading for today, let us look at the life of one who was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, the fishermen, Simon who is named Peter.

St. Peter is a man who, like us, is mostly content with his life. He makes his living as a fisherman. Yes, it is hard work and sometimes it is disappointing, but it is his vocation. Could he have been something else, probably, but fishing is an honorable trade, and St. Peter lives it as he should. One day, as Jesus is preaching to the crowd near the shore of the sea of Gennesaret, St. Peter, who is tired and busy securing his boat after a night of fishing without success, cannot but hear Jesus preaching to the crowd.

As it is with Jesus everywhere He goes, the crowds are intent on hearing every word from His mouth. Not wanting to miss a single syllable, this crowd presses in on Him as He stands on the

shoreline. Feeling the pressure of the crowd, Jesus looks around and sees two boats near the shore with the fishermen still in them busy washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, it just happens to be St. Peter's, our Lord sits down and asks St. Peter to move away from the shore so He can continue to teach the crowd.

St. Peter does not question who this man is who has entered his boat, or what is He doing there. No, St. Peter willingly complies with our Lord's request, letting Him finish His preaching. And why not, St. Peter, like the crowd is also learning. He, like the crowd likes what Jesus has to say.

Having finished preaching, Jesus turns to St. Peter and says, ***"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."*** (Luke 5:4, ESV) St. Peter having just returned from a night of fruitless fishing is not too eager to go back out on the lake for more disappointment. But rather than argue with Jesus, he simply says, ***"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."*** (Luke 5:5, ESV) It is interesting that St. Peter uses the word Master in addressing Jesus. This is a word that has significant importance in the day of Jesus. The Greek word used here by St. Luke, *epistates*, means Lord or Master. Undoubtedly, St. Peter was moved by what Jesus had to preach and he recognized Him as a holy man, a rabbi, thus the title, ***"Master."*** Our Lord's words had put in check St. Peter's natural inclination, his reason, to say, going back out onto the lake will be a waste of time, it will be a fool's errand.

We, too, guided by our reason, think it is a fool's errand to believe in God. This is true because reason lacks two things; it lacks trust in God's good will as it permits misfortune to divert us from trust in God, and it is not capable of properly ascribing or attributing divinity to the only One to whom divinity is due. Luther says, reason, "plays blindman's buff with God." When it reaches for God, it always misses. Rather than touch God, reason either touches the devil or that which the devil rules, its own notion, every time. Yes, it knows that God exists, but what or who God is only the Holy Spirit can teach. Man's reason cannot by itself enter a true relationship with God or know Him as God (Rom. 1:21). There is but one way to know God and that is for Him to reveal Himself to you. This is what Jesus did for St. Peter.

Although St. Peter's natural inclination was reluctant to follow Jesus' lead, there was something else telling him, no, don't be so hesitant, do what this man says to do. There seems to be something compelling, something quite true in His words. So St. Peter does what Jesus suggests, and to his great surprise he gathers in a catch so large that he had to call on his partners, St. James, and St. John to come and help him. Their catch was so large in nearly sank both of their boats because of its weight. Amazed and frightened, St. Peter, falling to his knees blurts out, ***"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*** (Luke 5:8, ESV) Realizing he is in the presence of a man from God, St. Peter's first reaction is to repent.

God had revealed Himself to St. Peter through His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. This revelation came first through our Lord's preaching to the crowd. Which so clearly reminds us of the words of St. Paul, ***"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*** (Romans 10:17, ESV) But in St. Peter's case, our Lord decides to use additional means to catch St. Peter's attention. He does this by revealing Himself through a sign, a miracle, the large catch of fish. However, we cannot think that He will do this for us. No, we cannot expect Him to cure cancer, or perform any of the miracles He performed while He walked this earth. Today, we are brought to faith as were the people who were standing on the beach while Jesus preached. We are brought to faith by the proclamation of His Word of the Gospel. This is sufficient.

After Jesus and St. Peter return to the shore, Jesus steps out of the boat and says to St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James, and St. James, ***"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."*** (Luke 5:10, ESV) Moreover, St. Luke tells us, ***"When they had brought their boats to land,***

*they left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5:11, ESV)* They became disciples of Jesus and they followed Him for the next three years, eyewitnesses of His miracles, hearers and learners of His Word, and fearful and sorrowful witnesses of His death at the hands of the Sanhedrin. During those three years their lives were changed in many ways, but often it was a reluctant change.

There is a pattern of mission here. We see the movement from one boat to two. Two boat crews carrying out the same work; gathering the large catch of fish. This is the pattern of the early church. When a “House Church” had gained fifty to a hundred people, that is at full capacity and overflowing, a group would split-off and begin a new house church (another boat) in the home of one of the parishioners. That is, the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the Gospel, would change pagans into followers of Christ. Through preaching, catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, through the Means of Grace, these eucharistic communities would go out into unchartered waters of unbelievers and fish for men, bringing them into the boat (the nave) of the church, to be served by Christ.

Although St. Peter hears the call and follows Jesus, time and time again throughout the Gospel we see how reason would get St. Peter into trouble, testing his faith. At no time is this more discernable than on the night of our Lord’s arrest. St. Peter denies our Lord three times. Reason had convinced him that his life was more important than faith in Christ Jesus. It is not until the resurrection that St. Peter’s reason was overcome, and he began to fulfill his calling; for he was *Called to Call Others* even when his reason said, no, let’s do something else.

Unlike St. Peter in the boat, we have the luxury of knowing about the resurrection. But still we are unable to decide for Jesus because reason prevents it. It takes the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the Gospel, to give us faith to believe in our Lord Jesus and His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

Like St. Peter, you and I were called by Christ to be His disciple; however, we weren’t called like St. Peter, that is immediately by Jesus. Instead, our call was a mediate call, it came through the means God has chosen today, through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it came through hearing the Gospel proclaimed by someone else. Their voice was the instrument the Holy Spirit chose for us to hear the Gospel and believe. Furthermore, although we are not called like St. Peter, our call is just as valid as his, and like St. Peter, we suffer from the same condition he did; reason always wants to get in the way of our calling. It always wants to get in the way of faith in Christ Jesus.

We want to fulfill our calling, but reason says, I’m not good enough or smart enough to tell others of Jesus. Reason says, what good does it do to tell others about Jesus, they don’t want to hear it anyway. Reason says, why should I try to get others to come to church, if God wants them there, He will see to. And on and on goes reason, providing every excuse we need not to fulfill our calling. Reason is an enemy of faith, it is an enemy of our calling, it is an enemy of the Gospel. Don’t be overcome by reason, fulfill your calling.

When you were called to faith, you were given that blessed gift from God purely out of His grace. But it is not a gift that you received only for your good. No, it is a gift you received for the good of others too. Does not Scripture tell us, ***“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*** (*Matthew 19:19, ESV*) Sure it does!

What better way to love your neighbor than to guide them to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? That Word of God which tells the world what God has done for their salvation; what God has done to undo their sin. What better way to fulfill your call than to proclaim the love of God through Christ Jesus to your neighbor, telling them that He is willing, for the sake of His beloved Son, to

forgive all their sins. To take their sins and cast them away from Him as far as the east is from the west, remembering them no more. What better way to fulfill your calling than to proclaim a loving and gracious God who gave His only begotten Son in death to save mankind from sin, death, and the devil. There is no better way.

This is the teaching of today's Gospel Reading. St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James, St. John and all who came after them, who were called by God to call others to believe in the forgiveness of sins won for them by the Son of God who took their place upon the Altar of the Cross and gave His body and shed His blood for their salvation and life eternal in heaven.

So don't worry about not catching fish. Christ has called you to go, like St. Peter, into unchartered waters, waters which you might believe are void of life. But as He did for St. Peter, He will do for you, He will lead you to waters teeming with souls readying to be pulled in with the net of the Gospel. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen