

SERMON- Epiphany 5 (C)

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Isaiah 6:1-8, [9-13]

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

February 9, 2025

Luke 5:1-11

Psalm 138

OPENING:

I can vaguely recall a sermon that I heard growing up, that was about this passage.

The takeaway that I remember was that Jesus was likely to show up, here on earth, when we were at work.

The preacher did not mean that metaphorically, as in *Jesus is somehow revealed to us in the span of our everyday existence*.

Rather, he meant: "When the Second Coming comes, Jesus will appear to us while we are at our '9-5's.'"

Recalling that, I had two responses: first, where were my parents taking me to church to hear such a sermon?

Second, what does this story have to tell us today, in February 2025, to this congregation, where "work" in these days and weeks means anxiety, threat, discomfort and confusion

I am speaking of course of our Federal workers, our government employees.

CAVEAT

Last week after the 10 AM service, I went from conversation to conversation in our building all talking about DOGE and "fork in the road" and the rest.

I left one in the Narthex, to find another in the Office Hallway, to escape that one to find one in the Kitchen.

Even if I don't preach (QUOTE UNQUOTE) "on it"... it's still right there.

So how do we do this, together, as people of God?

We are entering a time period in our common life together, where EVERY sermon delivered from this pulpit could be a response to a pressing, important issue that has occurred that week.

Know that I can't, always or maybe ever:

summon my own spiritual wisdom

and connect it to the assigned scripture,

while simultaneously applying precisely to fast-changing current events.

A part of me wishes I could, I know that I actually can't.

I cannot then, in this sermon for example, offer a learned lecture on employment law, the separation of powers, checks and balances, etc.

I can do many things, but I cannot do that.

I *can* pray with you, I *can* listen to you. I *can* hear you.

It's a tough spot, that preachers are in,

but that's why we get paid the big bucks and that's why we try to listen to God,
and to draw on this thing called Scripture as our guide,

and to promise, that in our preaching we can walk, together, carefully, prayerfully,
and judiciously and offer it all up to you and to God.

JESUS:

So for my sermon, I will skip to the end and just say that what I hear from this passage is what I mentioned at the top.

indeed: *Jesus shows up in the midst of our lives, in the everydayness of our vocations and the drudgery of our occupations.*

I think that's true, not sure about the Second Coming part.

Imagine Jesus coming to you:

into the ZOOM meeting,

in the midst of the Excel spreadsheet,

in the conference call,

into the minutiae of the office politics,

God in the person of Jesus Christ shows up **RIGHT THERE**.

To teach, to heal, to prod, to invite, to ask questions, and to be with you.

Hopefully, that's a blessing and a balm.

Many of you might be indeed hoping and praying that Jesus shows up, in flesh, to explain the latest email or to tell off this person or that.

GOSPEL:

The disciples being fisherman in our story actually complicates things a little.

The image of Jesus and the disciples at sea is so iconic, it's almost romantic.

But remember for them this was their livelihood, it was back-breaking, difficult work, that their families depended upon. It was also tied up in the political and social fabric of that time, dealing with taxation and government regulation and all that sort of thing.

So fishing and fish will be really important metaphors in our church and it can take us so many places. But this story is not, primarily, about fishing, or the fact that Jesus indeed gets a big catch.

Jesus does say:

“Cast your nets again into the sea.”

That takes some gall, and some nerve. You know, they have been fishing all night. These burly, blue-collar, rough and tumble fishermen must take a look at this carpenter turned travelling preacher and say “Who does this guy think he is?” He presumes to know more about fishing than we do. What impudence.

Imagine If Jesus showed up to your job, and said “run that report again”..... “give your supervisor or your employee” one more chance?

The point of that interaction would not be: “Gosh, Jesus knows a lot about my particular work at the State Department or the DOD or in any of the countless government acronyms.”

The point is Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves.

Which is even scarier. And more frightening than a big catch of fish.

The reality is that Jesus is willing to get into the boat with us, with our broken selves and say, let’s try this again.

Notice also who Jesus shows up to.

NOT to the world’s greatest fisherman

NOT to the region’s most holy fishermen.

He shows up just to everyday, run of the mill, fishermen.

Sinners, like you and me, and like Isaiah and Paul before them.

It's might be enough for you to say in your office behind your desk:

“My Lord, and My God.”

Enough for you to relent in the cubicle and say:

“Master, I am a sinner.”

A small part of you might say: “Why do you have to do it at work? It’s kind of embarrassing. I am not ready for it. I wish that it were to happen at church, or at least at home, then I would be ready for it.”

I love Shrine Mont as most of you know, our retreat center. People find God at Shrine Mont, consistently, the reason is because they are looking for God there.

God is, however, and of course, everywhere.

Even in the conference room and the water cooler.

Jesus shows up in the everydayness of our lives, in the bread and the wine, and the fish and the nets. And says, “here I am. What would you like to do about it?” He shows up to sinners and malcontents and tax collectors and shepherds and fishermen and says: “I am going to make what you do and who you are holy.”

CONCLUSION

So one takeaway from this passage might be: “I need to keep doing my job, keep at my vocation and doing it to the best of my God-given abilities for the glory of God.”

That is one takeaway, God turns bread and wine, water and fire, and fish, and the minutiae of your work into his saving instruments here on earth.

Another takeaway is that Jesus does not just want the fruits of your labors, the gifts of your expertise.

In fact, in the story, those get left behind. He wants more than that, he wants everything. Jesus did not save the fishing industry, rather he caught a big catch, solved one problem, created another.

What Jesus does in those situations is always, unfortunately, unpredictable and unexpected. But also extravagant and lifegiving.

One last story: this passage (either because you are looking for it or because of the Holy Spirit) took on a Meta-quality this week.

For the Preschool’s 50th Anniversary, we are researching fundraising opportunities, and I am working with a volunteer to get “corporate sponsorships” for donations.

I asked the volunteer if they would like me to go through our directory, and identify folks that works for companies that might want to participate.

She said yes and so I found out what I should have known:

Everyone here works for the Federal Government, or is a teacher, or a nurse.

We can’t have the Department of State sponsoring us.

I then felt kind of weird working for this volunteer, encroaching upon your occupations, praying that the next person would work for a titan of industry with money to spare.

Then I thought, Jesus did not have that fear, rather he seemed to revel in. By gentle invitation, inserting himself in our lives, promising to be with us in the boat, and then asking for us to come and follow him.

AMEN