

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 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." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

SERMON

I grew up fishing with my uncle and grandpa at Kaimana Beach and the Natatorium. I would pop out of bed early just to go fishing, unlike on a school day. The empty beach, the cool morning air, the sounds of the waves washing on the shore, the smell of the ocean, and the sun just beginning to lighten up the Waikiki shoreline brings back very happy memories for me.

The three of us had the same fishing poles and the same bait, but we always caught different fish. My grandpa would catch flounders, and my uncle would catch papio. I would always catch those darn lizard fish with big teeth.

Even today, my uncle would tell his fishing stories about how he always caught the biggest fish, and somehow the size of the fish gets bigger and bigger every time!

In today's gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus was being surrounded by another crowd, and unlike the crowd in last week's Gospel who wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff, this group knew of Jesus' miracles and teachings and they were gathering around him to hear the word of God.

The story of Jesus' ministry up to this point had him preaching and teaching in the Temple. This is the first account of Jesus going out among the people, into the streets, meeting them where they were and entering into their everyday lives.

Jesus got into Simon's boat, summoned him and asked him to go out a way from shore so that the people could gather on the shore and listen to him.

After speaking, Jesus told Simon to go out to the deep water and let down his nets for a catch.

Simon had already finished a very hard day's work and like many of us who have tried our hand at fishing, he had come up empty, or if they were lucky, caught lizard fish with big teeth.

The fishermen had already washed their nets and had them ready for the next day. They were probably very hungry, very tired, and very disappointed that they didn't catch any fish. They probably thought, why is the carpenter telling US how to fish?

They were done!

But Simon Peter, in an act of obedience said, OK, if you say so, I'll do it. Nothing more than that, just simple obedience to Jesus.

I am sure that there are times when we are totally worn out, tired from work, tired from school, tired from taking care of others, tired of cooking, tired of seeing bills, just tired of the demands of our lives. It is specifically in those times that I hope Jesus doesn't call me and ask me to do even one more thing before I rest!

But Simon answered Jesus' command. The nets are thrown back into the sea, then they are raised and are so full of fish that they need another boat to help with the load.

Simon Peter's response to the miracle of abundance was to protest that he was unworthy because he was a sinful man. But Jesus reassured him, do not be afraid.

Responding to God is scary. We all fear change. But if we stop for a moment and take a breath, we know that deep down inside us, and sometimes not until way afterwards, we realize that what God is asking of us is the right thing to do.

Fear is paralyzing.

Fear makes us resist growing into what God is calling us to be.

Fear makes us believe that we are not worthy of being loved—by others, by ourselves, and by God.

Fear casts out reason.

Fear holds us back from imagining the wonder of the future.

We can certainly imagine any number of horrible things that might happen, but it is more difficult to visualize something entirely new.

Fear might lull us into safety, but it does not tell the whole story. It traps us and makes us unable to experience the freedom that Jesus has to offer.

Do not be afraid.

And this is where God finds us. Just like Jesus found Simon Peter in his boat. God comes to us and asks us to do something that may not seem to make sense.

We don't have to be perfect for God to want to be in a relationship with us. We just have to drop our own baggage, our fears, and follow, just as Peter, James, John and the others, who dropped everything they were doing, walked away from their possessions and families and followed Jesus.

To be called by God to follow Jesus takes more than a willingness of heart and living through our main Christian values. It takes a humble response that we repeat every time we recite our Baptismal Covenant... I will with God's help.

We must actively choose to follow Jesus and we need God's help to do so, because the road is unknown and will present us with so many challenges and joys which we are unable to predict.

We have control over a great many things in our lives, and therefore we believe that we can control everything, including other people and events. But when our frustration is real, when our pain is real, and when our emptiness is real, we need to remember that we are only us, but God is God.

And as we live our ordinary daily lives, just as Simon did, we may suddenly experience a miracle—something unexpected and uncontrolled. And it takes us by surprise.

So whether it is good or bad, we are all challenged to respond with faith, knowing that Jesus is getting into the boat with us, no matter what.

And no matter if we feel that we deserve it or not, or no matter how great our fear or our joy is, Jesus meets us where we are.

So reach out and grab his outstretched hand.

Amen.