

The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany – 2022

Isaiah 61:1-13

1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

Luke 5:1-11

I suspect that most of y'all are students of human nature. Perhaps not in the classical sense; few of you have degrees in social psychology or marketing, but, nonetheless, you have a pretty good understanding of the mind of man. After all, at a very young age, you learned what it took for your mother to give you an extra scoop of ice cream or to bake your favorite pie. Let's not use the word "manipulate." That's such a tainted word and you wouldn't ever even consider manipulating anyone, let alone your mother. You knew how to *motivate* her, how to appeal to her better angels, as some politicians might say. Okay, so let's see if you can properly evaluate my nature, my character. Don't take this too seriously.

There are two ladies, both advanced in years, both devout. One lady, I'm not making this up, will always find a way to work into the conversation that I am tone deaf, can't sing a lick. The other lady, again, not making this up, thinks that I sing like Caruso, lyrical and elegant and captivating (and she tells me so every time that I see her). Here's where you get to test your understanding of human nature. Which of the two ladies makes me smile when I see her approach? To be fair, I'm quite aware that the first lady is much closer to the truth and that she loves me. The second lady, I've determined, loves **what** I sing not so much **how** I sing. To hear the words of Christ is heaven for this woman even if they come from my mouth. She loves me too.

A group of fishermen worked all night long and they didn't catch a single fish. What is their mood? You know darn well what their mood is – they're grumpy. They're cleaning their nets and they're tired and all they want to do is go home and go to sleep. It's not a "well, you win some, you lose some" moment like in sport fishing. This is their livelihood. This is their economic lifeline – and others are relying on them. I don't know any Hebrew swear words but maybe they were using some. You know human nature. You've been around people who have failed. You've learned to give them their space. Not these fishermen. Not this day. St. Luke paints a glorious picture of Christ and His church. You are in view. Christianity itself and our beloved congregation are in view.

Jesus is teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret. Luke is keen to tell us: "the crowd was pressing on him to hear the word of God" (Luke 5:1). Hearing the Word of God is not just listening to a word that is *about* God but it is hearing that Word which is *from* God and is God's *own*. Jesus needed a little space, perhaps to project His voice or to allow more folks down onto the shore, so He stepped into Simon's boat and put out a little and continued teaching. Just as soon as He finished speaking, He turns to Simon Peter and says that He is in the mood to go fishing. "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). We all know Peter's character. He's impetuous, head-strong. The words likely came tumbling out of his mouth in a bitter flash: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" (Luke 5:5a). What I want to know is how long between that verbal bit and what came next. The reason I want to know is because I'm fascinated by human nature, yours.

In the past, God has called you to do something. You know that, on occasion, your first reaction was stubborn refusal. “I ain’t doing that.” You conjure up all kinds of reasons in your head as to why such a request, even from Him, is ripe for refusal. How about “loving others as yourself.” Do you think that He calls you to love others only when it is convenient to you, when it fits your mood, your schedule or your personal tastes? Yet you often love others only when it suits you. Peter’s reflex answer can be distilled to four words: I ain’t doing that. How long was it before Peter said the next bit? Who did Peter look at as he worked out what to do next? Sometimes you sit on what you know God is calling you to do for days. Gradually, your “no” becomes “weeeelll, geeee, okay.” Peter said: “But at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5b).

Jesus saw more than Peter did that day. Jesus sees more than you do. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Do you trust that? The Lord Christ knew what His ministry will accomplish. He saw two thousand years of His church as He sat in Peter’s boat. He saw the NT era of salvation that has swept over this globe – and He wants *you* to see it.

Out they go, probably still in a funky mood. Down go the nets. As they yank them in... what’s this? Fish galore! Squiggling everywhere! The first reaction: A laugh, a cheer, muscles straining, and a quick call for help. Two boats, totally loaded, and they couldn’t possibly hold more. What’s the second reaction? Pulses elevated at the wonder of this catch, eyes wide, glances shot back and forth from friend to friend as if to say: “How can this be? Who is this Man? The power of God is breaking through in this Man.” The third reaction – human character, human self-awareness. The third reaction: The laughter turns to pain, at least for one man. The glory of the Lord brings the darkness of our sin to light. Listen to these words: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). You are a student of human nature. Who says such a thing? A repentant man, a man who hides nothing, who encounters the truth and is struck to the heart. Seeing ourselves as we truly are in the Light of God’s glory is troubling. Have you felt that pain? We have unclean lips and we live among a people of unclean lips.

Jesus’ absolution is swift. Do not be afraid. Memorize this bit from John’s Gospel so that you can convey it to someone who is awash in their own guilt: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). For all here today who know their sin well, do not be afraid, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Peter learned this. Later on, when Jesus proffered the idea that His disciples could leave him, if they so choose, Peter made this delightful statement: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68). At the end of this episode, with one phrase, Jesus Himself interprets the miracle. “From now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). The magnificence of the miracle is not the miracle itself but what Christ is saying through it.

The sea is the world. The boat is the church. The net is the preaching of the Gospel. The fish are the saints, you. Jesus is saying: This is what I will do. In a grander way, I will lay claim to a great host of people. In truth, Lake Gennesaret and this holy house are one. There is an

unbreakable tether between what our Lord did in the miraculous catch of fish and the fact that you are here, sitting in in the nave of Christ the King Lutheran Church, hearing about it. It is a prophetic miracle not a miraculous abstraction. The miracle explains what is going on now. God wants you to know what has happened in your life which is what Jesus shows you in this miracle. The Lord enjoyed the miracle – the complexity of it, the hidden reality, a miraculous illustration of the whole NT era. He would not go away from sinners, but would take our guilt, our shame, and our punishment upon Himself. This miracle pleased Him for it depicted something He wanted to do so badly that He would gladly die to do it – to draw you into His church. “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:11).