

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
17 July, Anno Domini 2022
St. Luke 5:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How does a person move from unbelief to faith? Is it a choice a person makes? Is it a matter of making good, logical arguments that move the will of man? That is certainly the most common belief. Man is capable of being convinced of the truth and he just needs to be shown that the way of the Bible is the better way. Given the opportunity to reflect on the evidence, he will come to the right conclusion because it makes the most sense. Therefore, what is needed is the most convincing argument, the clearest presentation of the facts, the most winsome conversation.

What this understanding of man invariably boils down to is that conversion is a matter of appeal. Make believing in Jesus as appealing as possible and people won't be able to give their lives to Christ fast enough. We want to hear the good stuff. We want to have fun. We want to be confirmed in all of the choices we are making for ourselves and our family. We want to be praised and made to feel good about ourselves. And there is no shortage of false teachers eager to do all those things for us.

But that is not the way Christ brought people to faith. That's not how He got people to trust only in Him for help and salvation. Jesus' evangelism technique would not have sold well on today's market. But that is because Jesus "knew what was in the heart of man." Jesus knew that man didn't simply need convincing. Jesus knew the darkness of man's heart and that sin had made man love himself and hate truth. The pride and of man had to be crushed because it was pride in a lie, a delusion of goodness and strength. Thus, as St. Mark records it, Jesus' first words were "Repent and believe." That isn't such a great way to make people like you.

Peter and his business partners learned quickly that Jesus wasn't interested in making you like Him. He wasn't worried about how many people listened. Of course He wanted everyone to hear and believe but He didn't temper His speech, He didn't soften His call to repentance, He didn't do any demographic studies, surveys, or questionnaires to find out what people wanted or thought they needed

most. Jesus' lesson in evangelism began by bringing Peter and his fellow fishermen into the darkest depths of fear and despair. Conversion always begins with death - dying to any delusion that you are good. Sinners must be brought to see that their goodness is wickedness and that before the holy God of heaven they stand condemned as evil. The Law of God must come down upon them with a crushing blow leaving us nowhere to turn and no place to hide. The very last thing our unbelief needs is comforting. The last thing our sin needs is to be ignored or encouraged. Sin and unbelief must be exposed and confronted and our consciences need to fear the wrath and judgment of God against us.

Thus Jesus, God of heaven and earth, confronted Peter and the others so that they had no choice but to consider their lives in light of the Ten Commandments. In that bright light they had no choice but to recognize that they could not stand in the presence of this man who had authority over the fish of the sea and all creation. Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom so many want only to think of as warm and fuzzy, was terrifying because He is God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth against whose commands we daily sin much, whose Word we so often doubt and argue with and deny. All Peter's fear could do in that moment was fall at Jesus' feet and, like the demons, beg Him to leave. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" The presence of the Lord is very dangerous. He kills fishermen and sinners of all kinds, because sin is death.

Cruel? Unnecessary? Ineffective? Foolish? Unloving? This is certainly how the world would judge Jesus' action. But what Jesus does to Peter is what must be done to all sinners. Indeed, to rip off Peter's blinders so that he could see his own wretched condition was the most merciful and loving thing Jesus could do. We are so blinded by our sin that we think our worst problem is the loss of our job or house, our difficult child, or our unfaithful spouse. These are only boats full of fish meant to drown our pride and self-sufficiency. We must all be brought to our knees like Peter, brought to the true terror of God's hatred of our sin and the eternal judgment we have earned. Our Lord must bring us to the very brink of death to force us to see that, in fact, we are already dead...dead in our sin and out trespasses. The crosses that are laid upon us are meant to be heavy. They are meant to be more than we can bear. Through them the Lord works to bring forth the prayer of Psalm 38 from our lips "O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me...I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart."

Conversion begins with death. Your Old Adam must be drowned and die along with all its evil desires and thoughts of self-righteousness so that you would look to Jesus, the gift of God, who brings you eternal life. Terrifying Peter wasn't Jesus' end game and it certainly wasn't to destroy Peter. It isn't to destroy you.

Judgement and condemnation are God's alien works. He exposes our evil and our degradation only so that He can do His proper work, the work that reveals His true nature and desire - forgiving, redeeming, saving. That is how God desires to be known by all. In Jesus, and no where else, can we find peace with God because all our sins, everything that brings judgement and terror, has been laid on Jesus. Jesus is the embodiment of God's love and will. We know and receive the love and mercy of God through what Jesus does for us and gives us, NOT through what we do for God. The wisdom of the ancients and of our own age cannot possibly imagine a more foolish thing...except perhaps, the way in which Jesus brings you the forgiveness of sins. Foolish worldly wisdom would always have you look to your own obedience, your own goodness as your source of comfort. But the conscience that has been struck by God knows that there is no comfort to be found there. All of Peter's expertise and knowledge were of no use to him. They couldn't save him from God's hand, nor can they save you.

God has put such false and lying wisdom to shame. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

In the tiny babe of Bethlehem the mercy of God came to dwell among His broken creation. In the unimpressive form of Joseph's adopted son, the fullness of God dwells bodily. In the bruised, pierced, blood-soaked flesh of Jesus, the wisdom of God shines forth as a bright light scattering the death and darkness that had fallen over us. In the otherwise plain waters of Holy Baptism you have been rescued from sinking underneath the waves of God's judgment and been placed safely in the ark of Christ's holy Church where He preserves His people. Under bread and wine, the very body and blood of Christ crucified is placed in your mouth to calm your terrified heart and assure you that God, rather than taking pleasure in your death takes pleasure in your eternal life, in saving you.

Undoubtedly, how God saves us does appear unimpressive and foolish. Why else would so many despise and reject salvation? But don't worry. That is how God

wants it. That is how God does evangelism and grows His Church. He brings sinners to the death of repentance and then raises them to life by forgiving them. He sends fishers of men to cry out “Repent and believe in Jesus.” The world will never understand or believe. God in His wisdom saves weak and foolish people by weak and foolish means. The strong and wise He has cast out and put to shame. He has cast the net of the Gospel and by it rescued us from the depths of our sin. There is no other way. You must die if you are to live. But do not fear. Jesus stands before you today to save you, to forgive you, to show you the love and compassion of your Heavenly Father. Your sins are forgiven and eternal life in Christ Jesus is yours. Come to the shores of His holy altar where He gives you peace.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.