

Psalm 62 Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 1 St. Peter 3:8-17 St. Luke 5:1-11

Faith in Action

I would like you all to turn to our Gospel lesson for today, St. Luke 5:1-11. If you don't have your Bibles with you, you can find the lesson on page 196 of your Book of Common Prayer. I realize that this is a very well known passage and you have no doubt read it often and even heard sermons preached from it on several occasions. Most of the time familiarity with the text is a good thing, but some times it may cause us to miss what God wants to say to us...and so we often have to pray first to ask our Lord to help us see the familiar passage through new eyes...eyes that will allow us to dig a little deeper into the printed page to see more than what our calcified craniums usually allow. I hope we can do that today with this familiar passage about the miraculous draught of fish.

The scene is set on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, perhaps better known as the Sea of Galilee. It appears to be early in the morning as the fishermen are cleaning their nets after the nights fishing – you see, they had to fish at night if they wanted catch anything, because the fish tended to dive down into the cool depths once the sun rose to escape the burning heat. However, by this time, Jesus had already attracted quite a large crowd... these were the 8:15 folk, if you will...and He knew the best way to teach them would be to for Him to get into one of the fishing boats, push out a little way from the shore, and talk from there because the slope leading to the lake formed a natural amphitheatre. So, that's what He did...and the boat, St. Luke tells us, belonged to a man called Simon...a man we get to know later as Simon Peter or just Peter.

Now, before we go on, perhaps we need just a little bit of background here on Simon's relationship with Jesus. We read in the previous chapter, chapter 4, that Simon had been

hanging out with Jesus for quite a while before this incident at the Sea...and that he had already witnessed Jesus' unique power to drive out demons and to heal the sick...in fact, Jesus had healed Simon's own mother-in-law. So, this is not the first time Simon got to see and to hear and to experience Jesus.

All this to say that his positive response to Jesus' command to launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch should not come as a total surprise to us. Remember, he had already seen Jesus do some pretty remarkable stuff. So, yes, he could override his faculty of reason because it had been overridden before.

So, I don't really want us to look solely at that aspect of this story (at his positive response)...rather I want us to look at it from a 'what if' angle. What if Simon Peter had answered, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; we are tired and weary. What You are asking for is unreasonable and a waste of time. It is just too radical and far-fetched for me to accept from you, so no, we will not launch out into the deep nor will we let down our nets. Sorry, Lord, but facts are facts...You, of all people, ought to know that the fish will be way down in the depths by now...you should know because You made them. Besides, what if we don't catch anything...I mean, this crowd will think we've gone bonkers and this might make them go do business with our competitors instead of us in future. And also think of how badly this kind of failure will reflect on You and Your cause...no, it is too risky and too ludicrous and too unreasonable to ask us to do that which is obviously impossible."

Now, before you dismiss this 'what if' too quickly, think and chew on it for a while with me, will you? Think on all the many commands of Jesus directed towards those who wish to follow Him. We saw a few of these last week, remember? Love your enemies,

do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. Turn the other cheek, do to others as you want them to do to you, be merciful as your Father is merciful, do not judge, do not condemn, forgive as you are forgiven, give liberally and sacrificially. How do we react to these commands of the same Lord Who asked Simon Peter to do what he, no doubt, considered unlikely? And we have not even looked at commands for us to lay hands on the sick so that we might pray for their healing...we haven't even mentioned making disciples of all nations...or of giving away your material things so that you might have treasures in heaven. And what about always esteeming other better than ourselves...what about those commands to rather suffer wrong than to retaliate...and I could go on and on. Aren't we in effect calling Him 'Lord, Lord', while stubbornly refusing to do the things which He says? And sadly, we don't do many of these things because we are afraid of what other people will think of us...that we have gone bonkers, or radical, or fundamentalist, or, God forbid, charismatic!

Or what if Simon Peter had said, "Master we have toiled all night and caught nothing; but we have seen you do the impossible so we know that You are well able to get us the catch we need. Thank You Jesus. You are great and wonderful and awesome and majestic. You are all powerful and generous and kind and compassionate and merciful and forgiving." And I can go on and on here...but what if Simon Peter said all these things, and then went back to tending and cleaning his nets...business as usual...what if he acknowledged that Jesus could do it, but then didn't actually launch out into the deep to let down his nets for a catch? This is just a different angle to the same story. We call Jesus Lord...we acknowledge Him to be our Savior, our Master, our God and King...we

profess that we believe the Bible to be the very Word of God...we say all these things, but do we actually do what we say? In other words, do we walk the talk? Do we walk just as Jesus walked? Do we take His Word at face value? Saying we believe the Scriptures and living out what we read in the Scriptures are two very different things. As Susan Hamlett says, "You cannot steer a stopped car."

Or what if Simon Peter actually did launch out into the deep and did let down his nets for a catch, but when he saw the amount of fish in the nets, he turned to the Lord and said, "Now look what You've done, Lord! My nets and boats are not large enough to handle this amount of fish! In fact, my expensive nets are actually breaking (did you know that they were given to me by my great grandfather?) and look, that boat is beginning to sink. Thanks a lot, Lord. Besides, I am sure there are all sorts of undesirable fish in there... what kind of a fish would be swimming around in the shallows on a hot day like today? They're probably half-dead anyway and they're going to spoil the other fish...and when the people see them they will stop buying from us because we have such ugly fish in our nets." Dearest beloved brethren, you know that old English saying, birds of a feather flock together? Well, that saying ought never to apply to us in the Christian Church, because we who are members of the Church...members of the one Body of Jesus...we ought to know that beneath the various things that divide us we are all alike...we are all sinners saved by God's amazing grace...we are all in need of God's love, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His saving and keeping power...spiritually, we are all birds of like feather. So, when someone from a lower income bracket or a different culture or color comes to us, we ought to accept them and embrace them and love them and treat them as we ourselves would like to be treated. But the sad reality is that oftentimes Christians do

not want to reach out to the under-privileged because they are terrified that they might actually take them up on the invitation to enter the kingdom of God and start attending their nice little upscale church! What will visitors think if they see the poor old Joes of this world sitting in our pews? So, like the person in our ‘what if’ version of our story, we would prefer not to cast our nets out in the deep so that we can keep those whom we consider undesirable out of ‘our’ nets, our boats, our church.

Or what if, after Simon Peter had done all he did and had witnessed this miracle, what if he had then stuck to his original response, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” What if he had refused to forsake all and to follow Jesus to become a “fisher of men”? What if he had protested and said that that kind of ministry was only for others, for the priests and the prophets. After all, he was business man and a fisherman...what did he know about the Gospel ministry? What did he know about evangelism and apologetics and of leading the lost to the Lord? That sort of thing just wasn’t his cup of tea...it wasn’t his spiritual gift. Or what if he had turned on that real spiritual voice and said, “But, Lord, You don’t want the likes of little old me, now do You? I’m just not good enough.” This is probably the most common problem in the church and always has been...sugar coating our reluctance to serve with all sorts of pious excuses. We know what He requires, but we are unwilling to comply...and we know that that unwillingness is wrong, so we begin to invent a variety of ways in which we can legitimately let ourselves off the hook, so to speak. This is nothing new...Moses did it, remember? So did Gideon, many of the prophets, and many of Jesus’ followers from the first century right down to our own day. Lord, you don’t want me...yes, I do. No, Lord, you don’t understand. I’m not the one. Yes, you are. Lord, let me put it this way. I am not able to

do what you ask of me because that is just not me. Yes, you are able, because it is ultimately not about you, but about Me in you enabling you to do what I command you to do...

Or, what if Peter had said, “Now wait just one cotton-picking minute! We have ourselves a lucrative business here. You want us to leave all this and follow You all around Galilee and Judea while You talk to people who never seem to understand You or who follow you for all the wrong reasons and who never seem to contribute a dime to the cause. I mean, who’s going to pay for all this, Lord? I have a wife and children and a mother-in-law to take care of, you know. Where’s the money going to come from for this endeavor? We certainly don’t have the resources ourselves! So, what’s the game plan? Is there some or other foundation that will support us – at least pay half of what we need so that the amount doesn’t seem quite so large when we ask our parishioners for support? We have to have some or other form or method of financing this thing...after all, money doesn’t grow on trees, you know. And what if no one gives to the cause?” Now, as many of you know, I have heard this objection more times than I wish to recall – especially when I talk about India. And like our Lord often said to His disciples, I am tempted to say, “are you still without understanding?” The God Whom we serve, dearest brethren, owns everything in the whole universe...He is the One Who made it...it is His. The gold, the silver, the cattle on a thousand hills...it is all His. Now, of course, He does want His people to be part of His generosity because everything we own comes from Him to begin with...and it is also one way we can show our union with Him and our gratitude towards Him for His many blessings...and so, sadly, oftentimes the funds we need to advance our labors for the extension of His kingdom are held up in the pockets of

those of His children who have not yet learned the lesson of willing, cheerful, sacrificial and abandoned giving. But think on this. We are those who claim to believe in eternity, right? What then does the unbelieving world see when they hear our claim, but see us investing (sometimes extravagantly) only in this temporary life? What does the unbelieving world see when they hear our claim, but see us withholding that which could care for those who cannot care for themselves? Like our Dalit brothers and sisters in India? Francis Chan says in his inspiring book, “Crazy Love”, that “the crazy part about God’s heart is that He doesn’t *just* ask us to give; He desires that we love those in need *as much as we love ourselves*...He is asking you to love as you would want to be loved if it were your child who was blind from drinking contaminated water; to love the way you would want to be loved if you were the homeless woman sitting outside the café; to love as though it were your family living in the shack slapped together from cardboard and scrap metal.” Radical? Perhaps...but isn’t that what Jesus is calling us to? To live a radically different life from that which is lived by those who have no faith?

All these ‘what ifs’ (and I’m sure you can think of many more ‘what if’ scenarios) address a professed faith that either has no corresponding action or that has the wrong kind of corresponding action. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church defines faith as “the human response to Divine truth, inculcated in the Gospels as the childlike and trusting acceptance of the Kingdom and its demands, and known as ‘the faith whereby belief is reached’.” It is the middle part of this definition that characterizes the human response to Divine truth as faith...listen again: faith is “the human response to Divine truth, inculcated in the Gospels as the childlike and trusting acceptance of the Kingdom and its demands, and known as ‘the faith whereby belief is reached’.” It is that

childlike and trusting acceptance of the Kingdom and its demands that makes all the difference. Just knowing that God can do the impossible has the form of faith without the substance. Simon Peter did not simply agree with Jesus...nor did he simply do as Jesus told him to do...no, he agreed, and did, and obeyed, and followed. That, dearest beloved brethren, is faith...faith in action.

In fact, faith without positive action is not faith at all. Likewise, a faith that extends only as far as that which we know we are able to do ourselves is not faith...that's mere arrogant assumption and presumption. As Angus Buchan of "Faith like Potatoes" fame says, "How arrogant we farmers sometimes become when we see a beautiful crop of wheat or corn, and have the audacity to take the credit. We plant, and do our best to cultivate, but we must leave the rest to God." Faith looks beyond what we know we can do ourselves...faith looks at our meager resources and believes that He Who created the universe is well able to supply exceedingly abundantly above and beyond all the things our Heavenly Father already knows we need...faith believes that we can never ever out-give God...faith looks at the impossible and the unreasonable...the radical, the ludicrous... and says, "Master, yes, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless *at Your Word* we will let down our nets." Faith allows us to see what God is doing and it allows us to hear what He commands and it amazes us...it wows us...and in that wonderment, we become willing to forsake everything...sometimes we even forsake what we call reason and what we think provides us with security...and we leave all to follow Him. Because, after all, real faith...true faith...biblical faith...is based on Him and His will, not on us or on what we can do, much less on what we want to do.

And so, my beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus, as you come to partake of that which in itself seems impossible...that which portrays the humbling invasion of Jesus into our world to take our filth and wickedness upon His own pure and spotless Self so that He could die in our place... that which demonstrates that unfathomable love of the Creator God for His creatures...as you partake of this portrait of the mind boggling love of God for us...ask Him to show you whether your faith in Him is a real faith or not...a faith in action...a faith in His ability to do the impossible. And if you, like me, come away sensing that your faith falls far short of what He requires then ask Him to grant you...to gift you that faith...because in many ways, we can only exercise such an act of faith once He acts upon our soul. And then, as He acts upon your request...your genuine, heartfelt prayer...ask Him to grant you the eyes of faith so that you might be enabled to see what wonders He is doing all around you. And then, when you hear His voice call you to follow Him (and believe me you will hear that voice once you get this far, if you are sincere), then ask Him to grant you the courage and the conviction to risk all; to give up whatever He asks you to give up; to forsake all so that you may be truly free to follow Him wherever He may lead you.