

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

'Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.'

As is the case with nearly every narrative of the Scriptures, we have just read a rather curious story.

The Lord is surrounded by a great number of people, a tumult, a great number, pressing upon Him from every side; lost men falling upon the Christ; begging to hear the Word from the Word made Flesh, to listen to God in God made man.

Elsewhere, when sinful men wish to hear Christ speak, Christ finds some high place, sits down, opens His mouth, and speaks His sacred Word. In our Gospel reading today, this is not so.

All beg Him to preach, but in their midst, He said not a word. Rather, *getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And there, he taught the people from the boat.*

A strange thing. Surely it would be easier to speak to the crowds from the dry land than to yell over the lapping of waves and the bustle of fisherman, tearing cord and rope and knot to stabilize a wind-tossed ship as it is pulled by the waves. But the sermon our Lord preaches is not so much in the words of His mouth, which Holy Luke does not even bother to record. His sermon is in the ship and the waves; in the fishermen and the cords.

In the ancient world, the sea was viewed as the territory of chaos and death; where no man had a place; where writhing beasts which surfaced only to devour and then disappeared into the wine-black water had their home. Where Leviathan ruled in fear; where the treasures of men were consumed in storm and lost forever with no hope of rescue. A domain in which no man had any right to be; that only God could tame by dividing it as He had in time past in the Red Sea and

the River Jordan.

This, then, is the sermon of our Lord.

The kingdom of heaven can be likened unto a fisher's vessel that has been set out into the sea. Within this ship there dwells a master of the house, and around this master, there dwell fishermen. The master asks his servants 'Go out into the depth of the sea, where there is greatest danger, that there you may fish while it is night.' And going out into the darkness of the sea in the shadow of night, the servants cast their nets, but no fish were to be found. And their faces were downcast. And when the sun arose in the east of the morning, the servants complained to the master saying 'We did as you said in the shadow of night, and found no fish. And now the daylight is coming, when no fish can be caught.' And the master replied, 'Cast again your nets into the water, in the light of dawn, in the warmth of the morning.' And the servants did as they had been commanded, and behold, there was a great catch of fish; so great that the servants had to summon another boat of fisherman from afar off to help them divide the fish, lest their nets break or their ship sink from the weight. Therefore in the kingdom of heaven, while it is night, shall no man enter the master's ark. But in the light of day shall all be drawn in.

'And the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"'

'And the Lord replied, "Blessed are your ears, that they hear, and your eyes, that they see." Hear, then, the meaning of the parable of the great catch of fish.

The Son of Man shall enter into His Church, which is the fisherman's ship, and it shall sail into the deeps of the sea, in the darkness of night, and there, He and His servant shall draw no man unto Himself, *'for the Son of Man must suffer many things at the hands of sinners, and must be killed.'* For in the Garden of Gethsemane He shall be betrayed, and all His own will forsake Him, *for it was night.* And in the night of His abandonment, the Son shall be crucified, die, and be buried. But when the morning comes, and the Son of Man shall *on the dawn of the third day rise again,* His servants shall again hear His voice, and in obedience to Him, *preach the Gospel to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

For this is the meaning of the master's servants casting their nets anew in the

dawn into the depths of the sea. And countless of the unbelieving world, drawn from the chaos and madness of heathen life, shall come into the ark of the Church, which is the meaning of the great catch of fish; so many that a second boat shall be called to share in the catch, which is the Church of the gentiles; for the *Gospel is to both Jew and Gentile*, and so great will be their number, that if it were not for the Church of the Gentiles, the very ark of God which bore all the living creatures of the earth during the great flood would itself be broken and shipwrecked. But the Church of Christ will not be broken, for when *it is high and lifted up, it shall draw all nations*.

It is very easy for any Christian, and for that matter, any pastor, to always think of this time, when politics divides families, when the media foments hate, and social media only foments more; when our achievements made in luxury pale in comparison to those of our ancestors who fought great wars, faced great frontiers, and mourned great losses; it is easy to look upon this time as these 'gray and latter days.' To see the churches empty and the sacred prayers of our ancestors grow quieter and quieter, and congregations seem to dwindle and dwindle.

It is easy to look out upon our world, our children, our nation; upon our failed friendships, our failed marriages, our failed lives, filled with faithlessness and weakness, and say with a hopeless tone the words of St. John: '*And it was night.*'

But to our Lord, it is no longer night. The morning has come.

In the midst of this sinful world He will bring light, for He is *the light of the world*. He will cast His net, and catch *a great catch*, drawing all who will believe into His ark by His baptism in His name. And this ark, this ship, this Church, this faith: it will have no end.

Be kind to one another, as I have seen you be kind. Be forgiving of everything, as you have been forgiven everything. Hold no grudge or complaint, for such things are merely passing, idle thoughts that have no place in the mind of those who will *never die, and even dying, will live forevermore in Christ*.

The world is dark, but Christ is light; and in Him is every beautiful thing. Therefore, look upon the light of the world, and do as the Apostles, who:

'Left everything and followed him.'

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Written by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 14:12b-20; Luke 5:1-11.