

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – St. Augustine’s Church-in-the-Woods, Feb. 10, 2019  
Nigel Taber-Hamilton - Isaiah 6:1-8, **Psalm 138**, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

This Gospel story's about so many things. It's got some significant things to say about evangelism, for instance - at least most of the sermons I've heard about this passage focus on that as the theme.

More fundamentally, though, there are two other things that lie at the heart of the story - relationship, and trust.

Let's look at it. There are two main characters: Jesus and Peter - who in this story is still called "Simon" - I'm going to stick with "Peter"!

We really don't know how well Jesus knew Peter but my guess is that they knew each other pretty well - why, otherwise, would Jesus be in Peter's own home - that's where the last chapter ended.

And they were connected by another bond - Jesus restored Peter's mother-in-law to health - and this in an age when even the simplest sickness could provoke a visit from the "Grim Reaper".

And now Jesus is on the beach near where Peter's been at work. I think that was no accident, either - Jesus already had the experience of large, boisterous crowds so he would have known that he would need a secure pulpit, and what better than his friend Peter's boat!? Push out far enough and you've got ready-made crowd control! A pulpit with a moat!

I imagine things seemed pretty normal until Jesus finished speaking and turned to Peter and said "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Now Peter has a really big problem. As with all those who fished the Sea of Galilee he had fished at night. And that night he had caught nothing. Now he was done. Any person who fished would know that if you fished all night and caught nothing you were never going to catch anything during the day.

To make matters worse, here is a landlubber, a stone-mason, craftsman, a non-fisherman, telling Peter the fisher how to fish!

And Peter's in front of a huge crowd. And not just any crowd, either - these are people who knew him. Can you imagine the snickering!?

And this is the central, most crucial moment of this story - the one that carries the really profound message. Peter has a dilemma based on whether or not he should trust Jesus, in spite of what he thinks he knows about fishing.

And - based, I believe, on the relationship he already had with Jesus - Peter lets down his nets.

Peter lets down his nets against his better judgement.

He lets down his nets in the face of the potential ridicule of the many friends, family, and business acquaintances who were surely in that crowd.

He lets down his nets in front of his fishing partners, who more than anyone knew that this was crazy!

Peter lets down his nets.

I recall when I was the Chair of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry in the Diocese of Indianapolis being asked by the Bishop, Cate Waynick, to attempt a restructuring of the Commission in a way I was convinced wouldn't work.

Cate was not only the Bishop, she was also my friend. I only did exactly as she asked because she was my friend, not because she was my bishop.

Our actions, our words, our decision-making in this world are deeply affected by the relationships we have, and the amount of trust we're willing to invest in them.

And perhaps the truest test of and sign of relationship is our willingness to trust, even when - especially when - we doubt.

After all, what trust is required if we know that the outcome of our decision-making will be positive?

Peter knows that Jesus isn't a fake, he knows that there isn't snake-oil in the bottle. And so he trusts, and he acts.

We all know the rest of the story- they make a great catch of fish- a staggeringly great catch of fish. So enormous they're in shock.

And this is the other part of the story: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." So says Peter upon realizing the meaning of this moment - self-realization has rushed in, and with it, too, a recognition of what it is about Jesus that Peter hasn't - until now - been able to grasp. This is absolutely the turning point in Peter's life, and it becomes the definition of a faithful response to Jesus.

Now, finally, we have a response from Jesus - one born of relationship and trust - "Don't be afraid." - and then Jesus redefines who Peter is - no longer the killer of fish, but the one who saves alive; "now you will be catching people."

This story isn't about the miraculous fish - its about the shaping of who the followers of Jesus are to become.

In the passages that follow today's gospel Luke will continue to unfold the implications of

being a follower, how followers of Jesus are to work out the kingdom of God in the world now. There will be the touching of lepers, sayings about the poor, and the call to do more than simply speak. To act justly will become a central theme. Jesus has already begun demonstrating that words and actions go together. The disciples will continue the Journey with Jesus, and beyond him, and put his words into practice.

But it all begins here, at this moment, in this story, when Jesus calms all their fears and invites them to follow him. And they do.

In Shakespeare's "Henry the Fifth" Henry speaks to his greatly outnumbered troops on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt - the eve of St. Crispin's Day. Facing as many as six times their number, Henry speaks to his army this way: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" Here, in the struggle, is the birth of community

"And," Henry continues, "gentlemen in England now a-bed Shall think themselves accursed they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

And so it was for Jesus, Peter, and the others from this moment.

And so it can be for us, if we are willing, in community, to trust one another enough do the difficult things of God together. Amen.