

Trinity 5

I take as my text today from St. Matthew's Gospel:

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

The focus of today's passage from St. Luke is *commitment*, and we might well add the question what is **Faith** without **commitment**?

This is an interesting passage. Without hesitation, St. Luke tells us, **Simon Peter, James, and John** leave their work and their families to follow Jesus. Think about that, sacrificing everything, an absolute commitment freely made, and by today's standards somewhat astounding.

How could anyone be so committed? Jesus was in the early stages of his ministry and certainly his fame had not reached such proportions as to create a *bandwagon effect* on potential recruits.

How then were these men able to leave everything and follow him?

In each case described in the Gospels, Jesus issued the call and the person dropped everything, right then, and followed him.

Though there are differing accounts in each of the four Gospels of the calling of Peter, James, and John, what we perceive in comparing each account is that Peter, James, and John were already acquainted with Jesus and had already been somewhat prepared by Jesus who had been actively engaged in his ministry for some months.

Perhaps, what sets apart this calling from our Lord is the miracle of the draught of fishes, an over-abundant catch of fish, straining the nets to the breaking point — an obvious and purposeful illustration used by our Lord to provide insight for a later age.

As St. Luke relates it, Simon Peter realizes with the miraculous catch of fish that Jesus represents something more than just a teacher or Rabbi and he falls down before our Lord in awe and fear.

And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

Peter, along with James and John, responded immediately:

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

And who were these men accepting the call of our Lord? If we look at what we know of the background of the Apostles, all indications are that none of them was poor, nor uneducated.

The family of James and John was well off enough to have servants; John, well known to the high priests, also had a house in Jerusalem; and **St. Matthew** was also known to be quite well off. Performing manual labor was considered honorable among the Jews of that time and quite common for the sons of the wealthy to be taught trades.

Another and later example was **St. Paul**, a scholar from a wealthy family with tentmaking as his trade. So, in all, it was a misconception that the disciples were *unlearned and ignorant men*, of low social position.

St. Peter, when he left his boat on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, did not lay aside his nets but changed them; he became as did the others a fisher of men.

The Church itself is like the fisherman's nets, catching a different kind of fish. Nets become tattered at times, requiring some mending, just like the Church which at times needs some restoration. The fisherman, as the lesson teaches, is to put out into the deep waters of the Gentiles where he will win a rich harvest of souls.

There have been many throughout the history of the Church who have received that unmistakable call and have forsaken everything to answer. From the early Church Fathers down to the present, the way has been paved with commitment, devotion, even martyrdom, in response to God's beckoning.

Consider **St. Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna, who had been well acquainted with St. John, perhaps his disciple, and instrumental in establishing and nurturing the Church at Smyrna. He stood up to the Romans until the year 155, when, after refusing to give in and burn incense to Caesar, he was burned on a pyre.

Perhaps one of the most famous and endearing of those heeding God's call was **St. Francis of Assisi**. Francis, from a wealthy family, was taken prisoner during a border dispute. After enduring many hardships, he was released. Uncertain of the pretentious life he had once led, he at one point changed clothes with a beggar on the streets of Rome.

The call finally rang home with him in 1208. Having heard the Lord's words from the **Gospel of Matthew** bidding his disciples to leave all, Francis did just that. He went on to found a monastic order and become one of the most cherished saints in Church history.

Even in the 20th Century there have been those responding to the call of our Lord, perhaps most well-known being **Mother Teresa**. Thus, we see so many examples in the History of the Church of those who have emulated the Apostles. And for each of the Saints we honor according to the **Church Calendar**, there are hundreds, thousands more who have gone unrecognized by history while truly submitting to God's will and taking hold of the fisherman's nets to cast in waters throughout the world.

Each of us in our life receives a call from God. It is not necessarily the call to be a priest or a nun; nevertheless, we each are called to some service to God, to make a commitment.

Do we respond without hesitation as did the Apostles? What sacrifices are we willing to make to honor that call? How do we recognize the call?

I would say that for most of us, even from the earliest times in the history of the Church, there is reasonable, sometimes considerable, hesitation in responding to God's call. Hesitation stemming from being unsure that we are indeed being called to something; understanding what we are being called to; and accepting the sacrifices which may be required.

Aside from the clerical or the religious life, there are many callings in the life of God's Church, just for example, serving on the vestry of a parish; serving as a lay reader or a member of the Altar Guild or an acolyte; being a spokesperson for the parish; or just attending Church and participating in the life of the Parish.

Whatever we do in God's service may, indeed, be our calling, however simple, however pretentious; whether we perceive it as a great sacrifice or hardly any sacrifice at all.

Essential, though, is that our response must be of our own free will, coming from the heart, from our love of God, and from our love for all his Creation.

Think about it. If we were in the Apostles' place, could we have left everything, family, friends, vocation, and wealth to follow Him?

Today, knowing the whole story, could we, would we, lay aside our nets and follow Him? Do we have the commitment?

If Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, can give up his Life upon the Cross to make it possible for us, his Creation, to overcome the bonds of sin and defeat death, what, then, are we willing to do?

Our Lord has given us the blueprint, the instructions, the tools and materials; the Apostles and early Church Fathers have laid the foundations; the saints and martyrs over the centuries have labored relentlessly; and now it is our turn.

As members of this Parish, we have an immediate calling: to join together in the corporate worship of God in a beautiful tradition we have inherited through our English Church roots.

If we accept that calling, then we must put ourselves to the task at hand, participating fully in the life of the Parish, our Family in Christ.

Remember — our Parish is a family, a **Family in Christ**, and, as a family, we are called to care for each other; to support each other when the going is difficult, when life's road gets bumpy, and to rejoice with each other when the times are good.

Finally, if we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, we also accept that we are willing participants in our own salvation and that requires commitment. Not a some-time commitment, or a one-time commitment, but a full-time commitment, not just at our convenience. It must not become a stumbling block to our own salvation.

Our commitment cannot be compartmentalized — religious commitment here, secular commitment there, family commitment over there — it is one commitment which affects everything we do in our daily living, and, while we may not receive such definitive calls as did the Apostles, or St. Paul, we do have our several callings requiring a commitment on our part.

Whether it's a little voice that won't be quiet; maybe a newspaper clipping or photograph; in meditation surrounded by **God's Creation**; or something someone said; regardless of the calling, it is through the **Love and Grace of God**, and through the **Body and Blood of Christ** that we are enabled and strengthened in fulfilling our commitment as members of the **Body of Christ** through which we find joy, happiness, and eternal life.