



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, February 10, 2019

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Isaiah 6:1-13 | Psalm 138 | I Corinthians 15:1-11 | Luke 5:1-11

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

For the past few weeks we've been reading through St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In it, Paul deals with several aspects of Christian life: ethics and morals, the work of the Church, and the power of love. Today we come to the opening of the final section of the letter. In it Paul returns to his foundational message – "that Christ died for our sins... was buried, and... was raised on the third day..." In all that we know of them, there is no indication that the Corinthians doubted any of this, but it's clear that Paul wanted those first Christians, as well as those who would follow, to be reminded of where their faith started and not let it fade into the background like familiar wallpaper to be taken for granted.

Paul tells his readers that all of what we may learn of the workings of God, our knowledge and study must begin with the understanding that Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised. Paul sees faith as more than subscribing to a particular belief. Faith is what leads to salvation, and Paul is focused on this point because salvation was ultimately the only thing in which he was interested. He knew full well that our need for salvation is often the last thing any of us want to face. It didn't come easily for him. He had to be knocked off his horse and thrown to his knees. If that was his experience, other people might also need some help, even those who had been closest to Jesus.

In today's gospel we see the early days of Jesus' ministry. Simon, along with a few other disciples, has met Jesus and witnessed some of the first miracles. Simon's own mother-in-law was one of the people Jesus healed. But there's no indication that any of this had much of an effect on Simon. As we'll see later, when something grabs him, no one can miss it, and as this part of the story begins it hasn't happened for him yet.

While Jesus is sitting in Simon's boat, teaching the crowd, Simon is off washing his nets. (He was never very interested in sermons). It's not until the miraculous catch of fish is hauled ashore that we see an engaged reaction from him. That miracle grabbed his attention and held it far more urgently than

any sermon could. In what will become typical behavior for Simon Peter, he says and does exactly what his heart, and his gut, tell him.

Simon doesn't thank Jesus for the abundant catch; he doesn't praise him for his power over nature. Simon, in all his mortal inadequacy, falls before his Lord, overwhelmed, declares his own sinfulness and begs Jesus to leave him alone. Whatever it is that Simon feared Jesus would do to him, he can't or won't ask for forgiveness, or acceptance, or love, and certainly not salvation. Nor does he realize that all of that has already been given to him, because he is trapped inside himself and can't see anything else. Sin does that to a person. Simon Peter knows that world and is comfortable with it. Meeting God forces him to face some basic realities about himself, yet he fails to see the reality of the God who stands before him who offers him another way.

Jesus doesn't condemn Simon. What Jesus does is to give Simon a new vocation, a purpose in life. His sins are forgiven and in that blessed assurance he will follow Jesus and join him in bringing others to God to be filled with the same abundance he received. Simon would now live and travel with Jesus on a difficult journey. The message of salvation would not be accepted by all who heard it. Simon would also sin again and would again fall to his knees before Christ. But no matter what happened, the basic truth remained the same for him, as it does for us – through Christ our sins are forgiven and in their place we receive life.

That abundance is what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus offers us and a world trapped in its own self. None of this is about condemnation. Jesus didn't give himself to sentence us to death, but to bring us to life. Whatever else we learn, whatever else our faith teaches us, the basic message is the same – "that Christ died for our sins... was buried, and... was raised on the third day..." The first step of faith is that we believe that we are forgiven, and loved, and saved. Then we will see that there is nothing to fear, only a life to live.