

SERMON - THE 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 22 JUNE 2008
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Luke 5:5 (KJV)

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

Some years back, Maxie Dunham, a Methodist pastor from Memphis, Tennessee, wrote a book entitled Coping As Christians then subsequently developed that theme into a study course.

It is about, surprisingly, coping as a Christian in today's societal environment, coping with the everyday pressures of life.

Living the Christian life isn't dwelling on the mountaintop. It is more like driving on a long straight interstate, boring. Living the Christian life is rather plain, somewhat drab, mundane, uneventful.

Living the Christian life is work, hard work, to stay the course, to maintain the faith.

We all have those times in our lives where we feel closer to God, those times of joy such as at a wedding or a baptism and those times of grief and loss. We feel the close presence of God in an emotional, visceral way.

But how about the times, the many times, we get up in the morning and the most we can expect is another drive to the office, an uneventful day at work, and television after dinner when we get back home. That sounds pretty exciting, huh?

But it is in those kind of days where we have to stretch, to stretch out our lives to God, to reach for the faith of an Abraham, a Noah or a Saint Peter.

Abraham left his family, his comfortable surroundings, all that was familiar and struck

out into the desert in obedience to God. At one point God even had him in the situation that he was going to sacrifice his only son and heir. Abraham never lost his total obedience to God.

God told Noah to build the Ark. This task was believed to have taken over a hundred years. Noah just kept working on this greatest of all backyard boat building projects ever. Can you imagine what his neighbors thought? But he just kept on going.

Peter had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. (Many of us who go fishing can relate to that.) But he obeyed Jesus and was overwhelmed with the results.

Obedience. Faithfulness. These are key to coping as Christians in today's world.

We prayed this morning in the Collect for God to direct the course of this world so peaceably that we, the Church, can serve Him in godly quietness.

That Collect was written at the time that the Roman Empire was being overwhelmed by all manner of barbarian tribes, at the time the Empire itself was collapsing, a time of fear and uncertainty.

This Collect implores that God will direct the events of life so that we can worship him in peace.

Living a Christian life today is not peaceful, peaceful in the sense that it is without stress and pressure; stress from the uncertainty of the economy and the world political situation, pressure from the demands that placed on us daily to "keep up with the Jones."

We, individually, can rarely impact on the economy or the world political scene but we can take a step back and not get caught up in the race for wealth and worldly success. We can position our lives where God is in the center, where God is the most important aspect of our lives.

We can adopt the attitude that all we do and all we say and all that we are reflects God, reflects that God is in control of our lives.

When we lived closer to the soil in a more subsistence form of livelihood, we had a closer feeling of the presence of God and His providence. As we have moved further away from tilling the earth, it seems that we have moved further away from having the reliance that we had on his direction and intervention in life. We have, in fact, replaced God with our own “self.”

We now need to return to a simpler, less complex style of life and to begin to rely on God and not on our own self-reliance. We have to develop a mode of living that does not rely on foods grown halfway around the world, or technological gadgets that are supposed to either entertain us or allow us to communicate across the globe, or on clothes that are produced in near slavery conditions in third world countries by godless, greed driven multi-national corporations.

In short we have to return to God, we have to return to God even if it means that we will be entertained less, be able to communicate less, have to eat seasonally produced and locally grown food, to buy locally manufactured goods and rely on Him solely.

Then we will not have to compete with God for our own time, talent and treasure.

We pray for peace. We pray for peace but we will never have peace in our lives until we put God in his entirety as the center of our everyday, each day after day, lives.

Amen.