

SERMON – THE 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 12 JULY 2009
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

I Peter 3:8ff

Luke 5:1ff

+In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen+

The very first President of this country, George Washington, was by all accounts a rather remarkable, intense, and focused man, who was also marked by considerable reserve and quiet reflection. He had a keen ability to see the strength in others and make use of it for the greater good, and he was an astute judge of character, being capable of choosing to place around himself the greatest minds of this day. His first cabinet included: Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, who single handedly put in place the banking system and economy of the U.S.; Henry Knox, Secretary of War, whose military and defense acumen set the fledgling country on safe footing in a very unstable time; and finally Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, who authored much of the Declaration of Independence, and of whom John Kennedy once remarked to a large group of scholars and statesmen gathered in the White House, "Never has there been such a convergence of wisdom and intelligence in this room since Thomas Jefferson dined here alone. But like most humans Washington had his quirks. He would not shake hands thinking it beneath the dignity of the Presidency. He often rode from town to city in a carriage only to stop before entering his destination to mount his white stallion, Nelson, in order to ride in triumphantly. He was an intimidating figure standing 6ft. 3in. and crowds parted as he made his way through the streets—except for one reported occasion. History tells that Washington came down the center of a boulevard nodding to the crowds who moved aside, all except one young boy who stood in the center of the

street gazing at the great leader. Washington stopped, dismounted, spoke with the young man, and then hoisted back up on Nelson and continued on his way. Later, when asked why he dared do such a thing the boy replied, “He had Yes in his eyes and Welcome on his face.”

The Gospel account appointed for today is the calling of St. Peter and others to be disciples. i.e. a calling to discipline their lives for a purpose and that purpose was to have on their faces and in their actions the YES, which God speaks to the world. Remember—“Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.”

Like most of you I have read or heard this text read multiple times, and frankly it seemed cut and dried without much more to be said. But this week it appeared very differently to me. Here are the disciples, dog tired from a night at work. They were doing what they always did save on the Sabbath, fishing with nothing much to show for it; so much effort and so little result. When this is your way of eating and earning a living that is not the outcome you want. So, ready to hang up the nets, wash up, and go eat, they are met by a man who says, “Let’s do it again.” We can hear the weariness in Peter’s words, “Master, we have toiled all night”, or in vernacular, “Are you kidding me.” What makes you think the results will be any different this time? What is the contemporary definition of insanity? “Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”—Covey

But they acquiesce and try one more time, and now everything changes—especially their outlook and their lives. What is the difference this second time? It isn’t the clutch of fish that requires 2 boats, as astounding as that is. Peter’s words, “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man”, give the clue. It was the relationship with Christ that transformed their efforts eventually creating the miracle of the Church. He tells them he will now make them

fishers after humanity—You will become God’s Yes for the world. They are called, beckoned, and urged to go on doing the SAME , the very Same things they had always done. They well invited to go about living their lives simply, among the same people they had known, with the same needs they had always experienced, with one difference. They now spoke on behalf of Christ. These were not exception men. There was no Jefferson here. Yet Christ was willing to entrust them the opportunity to be His face to the world with the YES and WELCOME the world sorely needed both then and NOW. There was no call to be extraordinary or exceptional; no insistence on scholarly skill or studied rhetoric. The call was to go about the ordinary, the daily routine, the commonplace, but seeing all of that as the stage where people can encounter God, and maybe that will happen even thru us!!

We Anglicans tend to be a bit reserved and a trite skittish about discussing our faith. Perhaps we don’t want to appear to be Bible Thumpers. This Gospel calls us simply to be ourselves with one exception. We are truest selves in Christ. It reminds us that in every situation, each encounter with another soul, in any word or action there is a split second beforehand where we can ask ourselves, “Who will I represent just now?” What will this individual, into whose life I now mingle, leave having experienced? Will it be they walk away feeling diminished, used, lessened, OR will they have seen the face of Grace and enrichment. It is in the everyday that Christ comes and beckons to the world.

I have been asked many times over the past couple of years where I go to church. I used to say, “St. John’s Anglican; we’re just a small mission”. I have removed the words “just” and “small” because they suggest insignificant and that is just plain false!! When I see the interactions of love and concern shared here for one another, or when I think of how many

children and parents do not go to bed hungry because of your sharing every week, I know insignificant is a lie. IF we could but see the results of what a small group in number project into this community we might be astounded. If we could look into the eyes of those comforted by the smallest gestures, we might be overwhelmed that they have seen the face of Him who fed the 5,000. We would know how miraculous it is that in the everyday Christ is using us to fish for a hurt and broken humanity that dwells all around us.

To be an instrument of God's work in the world requires only that we, ourselves, acknowledge our calling and dependence on Him. It is not that we have of our own volition and effort something that everyone else lacks. It is rather that we have come to know the dark spots in ourselves, the failed attempts at self-sufficiency, the times when pride or exercise of personal power have led us to neglect or hurt others, and we know because of His love for us anyway, that **there is no future in those ways!!** Look at the world around us if you need evidence of this. Most likely it has been at our own darkest moments that the gentle hand or voice of another has invited us to rest in God's love and care. Once we have crossed that threshold life becomes dear and we are free to give it to others. We are called the Church; The Body of Christ in, but not of, the world. All around us people are swimming to and fro lost in false and fruitless attempts to find just the right person, the perfect possession, or the stupendous career that will complete the emptiness they feel. The truth is that abyss is far too deep for anyone or anything in this world to fill, but Christ's acceptance and love can transform the search and lead people away from the false gods that always fail. By inviting others into our lives we are giving them over to the One who can transform and rescue from what harms us all.

The words of Christ to Peter are the same ones He speaks to us. The remarkable, shocking, mystery and miracle is that Christ does this in and with everyday folk like us. We become and carry the Yes in His face.

The great medieval saint, Francis of Assisi, told his Friars and Friends, “Preach the Gospel at all times; and when necessary, use words.”