

## Epiphany V Year C

When they had done this, they caught so many fish, their nets were beginning to break....and seeing this miracle they left everything and followed him.

Lewis Grizzard says that there is a difference between being naked and being nekked. Have y'all heard this? Naked is when one doesn't have on any clothes.... Necked is not having on any clothes, and something on your mind.... There's also a difference between fish'n and fishing. Fish'n is when a Dad and his son; or a mother and her daughter, to be inclusive here....or all of the above...put in their boats on a halcyon day, early in the morning, no hint of a cloud, the water like glass; humming across the grass flats towards open water... dropping lines at a leisurely trawl; the taste of salt water on the lips; the occasional caw of seabirds wheeling to an arcane rhythm; the warmth of the sun evoking memories of fish'n trips past; the sudden tug on the line, and the bend of the rod; the rush of adrenaline; the wonder at what might be on the end of the line.....the clicking of the reel...the zing of monofilament being taken back into the water yielding to the power of the deep.....finally the flash of silvery mackerel spent at last alongside the gunwale. If all goes well they'll have enough for supper, or perhaps enough to share with friends....they notice the beauty of the bay, mirroring the cobalt heavens; the curling wake left behind whispering of another

homecoming....the world at peace... When you go fish'n the worst that can happen is that you catch no fish....or for some perhaps that you do....but then there's always another day.....that's fish'n.

Fishing is another story. Fishing is when one fishes for a living....a tough living....when one is weeks at sea....where what you catch matters....weather is a serious issue....handling rusty cable in the brutal heat of summer....and in many cases the sub-freezing temperatures of winter....sharp surfaces always to guard against.....competition.....unfair prices.....government regulations to contend with....experts say fishing is one of the top three most dangerous professions on earth.....that's fishing.

The fishermen in our story today have been fishing, not fish'n. We are told that they have been fishing all night and have caught nothing....that's not good in the economy of the Roman occupied near east. On the best of days....on the best of catches...one can barely eke out a living in this world of empire....taxes are unbearably high....the merchant cartels get their disproportionate cut....the profits go to the wealthy...to work all night in vain is a serious situation in a world in which the ends rarely meet, and there's no stress like financial stress, and it would be hard to muster the will to say ....well there's always another day.

We want to make this gospel scene into a picture postcard, don't we? It's right there in our window...a peaceful day of fish'n...rugged fishermen who resemble, say, Jeff Bridges going all religious over this miracle worker, Jesus, who by performing this miracle somehow proves that he is the son of God; but remember Luke is not relaying history here. Luke is laying out his theology. Luke is holding up for us two worlds. The first is the world of empire, a socio-economic system that is degrading and dangerous, and unsustainable, and unjust; and the alternative is the world as God sees it: a world in which our lives are lived in compassionate deference to the good of our neighbor. The way of Jesus in short. This is about catching, rescuing people from the jaws of shame and indignity and hardship... This is really a story about repentance; turning from a life characterized by the rigors of fear and anxiety and indignity and despair.... To a life of promise, and meaning, and fulfilment and joy. In his epic poem *The Wasteland* T.S. Eliot coined a phrase describing the modern world. There is a scene where the poet sees people on the streets of London shuffling to their worn and tired jobs. He says, quoting Dante at the gates of the Inferno, "I'd not thought death had undone so many." Eliot's coinage is that we are physically alive, but in truth... dead... "Death in life" he calls it. The modern dilemma; the human dilemma. Some things haven't changed. The prophet Ezekiel two and a half

millennia before asks essentially the same question looking at the ruin of his people: “Can these dry bones live?”... and God answers the prophet and says that is for us to choose. These would be disciples, and all of us would be disciples, are confronted with a choice. Peter is our protagonist...our everyman in this story....Peter has a choice to remain in a fixed failed and unsustainable reality....fishing in the dark, as it were....which is in truth no reality at all...instead, a death spiral only going to get worse...the ways of a world corrupted by power taking its toll on these men stuck in a system stacked against them....The miracle here is that there is a choice, the miracle of free will....the choice of becoming fishers of people; which is to choose Love; that Love has the power to bring life out of death.... The alchemy here is that to give ourselves away for the good of the other is to in fact save ourselves. Love is the miracle, but Love is what we are made for, and it is not magic; it is real, and it will restore our world to God’s right order of shared abundance. ....

Like the prophets gone before...as Moses called Israel away from herding their sheep into their true call...as Gideon is called away from threshing wheat....as Isaiah is called away from the Temple...Jesus calls Peter out of the doomed world of its own devices into a life of uncontained abundance....and by the way this is a dangerous life too, we are

warned....this fishing for people....It will be opposed in flagrant ways... and in subtle ways as well....the peace of God it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod....says the poet.....But to choose the way of Love is life-giving; and true; and suffused with beauty... and that is all the difference. This is a choice for life... choosing Love is choosing life.....We live in a world full of deathly distractions: wealth and power; success; the pursuit of happiness; hyper consumption; the vainglory of self.... but the shimmering, feral truth of the matter is that we are called to serve. The mystery of the universe is not a riddle or an equation to solve. The mystery simply invites us, coerces us into the experience of mystery, and Luke is telling us that the way in is to be about catching people up in the loving arms of God... inviting people to take a seat at God's table....This is what it means to follow Jesus.....not that we believe in a magician....but that we quite simply make a life of loving our neighbor....And that is resurrection life for real, not a singular event in history, but an ongoing and present reality...Do not be afraid Jesus says....from now on you'll be catching people.

We are being told, brothers and sisters, if we have ears to hear... we are being told the way to God... the way to the mystery of all things....Love your neighbor.....love your neighbor. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the

first and great commandment; and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,” Jesus says.... This is to what the whole of scripture calls us...But this isn't an answer to a complicated cosmic enigma... this is an invitation into a practice... a practice that will lead us into the mystery at the heart of it all.

We, my dear friends, have a choice, always a choice .....We have a choice to get about fishing....catching and bringing home the lost....the diseased of our world....the poor among us....catching wind of injustice and helping to set it right.... catching with compassionate arms the dispossessed....setting free the ones in bondage.....our world depends on it....we have to become consummate fisherfolk.....we must recognize what the tug of the line means.... We must learn to read the tides....we must be attuned to see true life when it flashes in the deep....we must grow to relish a day of hard fishing.....who in our fishing learn to fish....and become wise with the lore of fishing until we pass it on to fisherfolk yet to come.

Stanley Hauerwas, noted Ethicist at Duke Divinity School, says that ours is a culture built on the fear of aging and death....Gold's Gym, the latest diet, plastic surgery, pharmacology, etc., but I think perhaps what we fear most....is life... and Jesus calls us to life....this life that ramifies

beyond our knowing and changes our world for the better...this abundant and dangerous life of living the resurrection..... perhaps our greatest fear is our fear of being raised from the dead. But Jesus says to us: "Have no fear"....take courage..... Live for that which is real and true...the way God intends the world to be.....Jesus did no miracle on the shores of Galilee....he spoke the truth, which is miracle enough....He shows us what God dreams for our world that God loves.....a world wherein Love is always the choice.... And the day has come, there is no other ..... and not that there is anything wrong with fish'n....but who wants to go fishing?