

Sermon 2.04.07

Probably, many of us would rather be standing along side some large lake of unfrozen water right about now. Like, say, South Beach in Miami, especially today, of all days. But, I hope we can rejoice, instead, in the images of warmth by the seaside of Lake Gennesaret generated by our Gospel lesson this morning. St. Luke invites us into baptismal waters to see the significance of spiritual water-life in our lives. Water, of the warm sort, and all that those waters produce, are integral and integrated signs of our spiritual life in Christ. First, in our baptisms. Then, in our daily walk, or should I say “swim”, to keep the metaphor, with God, difficult as that may be, and finally in how we make decisions about the public conduct of our lives in ways that tell the story of Jesus in our personal lives.

With the crowds pressing in on Jesus at the shore, Jesus felt and acted on his call to teach them. Sitting in a boat on the water, proclaiming the powers of God and the love of God for them, Jesus wanted to give each of them hope. If it were me, I would have pushed my way through the crowd and looked for a piece of high ground or a rock to stand on to do my work. I certainly wouldn't have bothered the tired and luckless fishermen to use their boats right then. They would've looked too exhausted and beaten up for me to want to disturb them. Jesus is gutsier than me. He jumps into Peter's boat, prevails upon him to row out a bit, and from there, in the water, he gives the God-message. Jesus didn't sell Peter short. So, instead of talking from the shore line on terra-firma, Jesus preaches from a boat, on the water.

Just earlier in Jesus' life, he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Maybe the power of his words this day would be enough to draw people into the water, where he was, and they themselves would be baptized. But, at the very least, this is what Jesus' baptism meant to him. It was his identity formation, if not in his own mind, certainly for the sake of the rest of us, that we too would know he is the one favored by God and we're to listen to him. Our baptism is at the core of our lives, too. In much water we were marked with the sign of the cross forever. We were water-buried with Christ in the tomb and we rose from the dead in new water-life with him, too. That is a fact of our lives. But, it needs renewal. We need not only be reminded of this baptismal promise once made for us, but we need to be washed in it daily. Maybe the people on the shore listening to Jesus that day were tugged a little bit in their hearts, to move closer to the water, maybe even to step into the water to hear words of Life, better. Do you resist the full plunge into the Holy Spirit life, too, and need a bit of nudging each day so that you aren't afraid of what it means to be called into following Jesus with all your heart? Anyway, that's where Jesus is. In the water.

Second, much that is of great value grows and flourishes in the water. Fish to feed a hungry people. The sea yields a meager livelihood for fisher folk that somehow provides for their families and brings them into an unforgiving market place daily where they interact, sometimes futilely, sometimes favorably, with friends and customers. There are days, though, where the luck of the fisher man runs dry. Even so, he's still had to do all

the work preparing for the workday, as if there'd be a huge catch. Such was the luckless, exhausting day for Peter and his colleagues, when Jesus came to the shore.

What does this carpenter's son know about fishing? Apparently, not much. But, Simon Peter indulges him in his request to use his boat. And, indulges Jesus further when he says, "Now, let's go fishing!" And, then, the abundance! Now, notice something here. Simon knows fishing. Simon has worked all night long doing what he expertly knows are the right things, but he's had no success. God did not provide that night. In spite of all his preparations, Peter was powerless over that. He's tired, hungry, disappointed, frustrated, and, he's still got work yet to do, to make his boats ready for the next day, maybe with the same results. Who knows? All this to do before he gets to rest. That's when Jesus comes calling. Right in the grit and grime of the frustrating day. Before he's had a chance to scrub himself clean of the fish-smells of his profession. Before he's had a chance to change clothes to get ready for Synagogue. Before he's had a moment to put on his mask of propriety. Jesus speaks to him when he's least ready and least able to resist.

Let me equate this moment of high vulnerability to silence. We flee from this kind of moment. For instance, what do you feel when there's an unexpected, extended moment of quiet in our worship service? Do you wonder if something's gone wrong? Is the pastor lost? Is there a misprint in the bulletin? Have we just done the wrong thing? It's awkward. It's unsettling. Do you feel anxious? You want to fill in the space as quickly as possible. Get things moving. Get things done. Do. Do. Do. "To be is to Do" Socrates. "To do is to be" Aristotle. "Do be do be do." Sinatra.

Why do we flee from moments of silence? Why do we resist them? Because there, we might be confronted with deeper levels of our beings. There we'd be confronted by our unwanted feelings, scary intuitions, desires and needs, says Lisa Dahill, in her book *TRULY PRESENT*. As if we need to keep these things away from God. If you've ever been really busy doing something, have you noticed how quiet you get? That's the state of mind I picture Peter in. So busy gathering up his now filling-to-overflowing-nets that he becomes aware of his silence. And, in that moment of silence, he realizes he's in the presence of the Holy One of God. His faithlessness suddenly strikes hard at his center. All his defense mechanisms fade away because he's just too tired, and perhaps too puzzled, to resist his deep moment of truth about himself. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Well, where's Jesus supposed to go? He's in a boat! Jesus' well known ability to walk on water aside, He's not leaving the boat. That becomes a welcoming gesture that can't be lost on Peter. Jesus stays in the place where Peter is most afraid and vulnerable to himself. Jesus loved Peter that day, like he was the only person on the planet.

Jesus will be in that place in our lives, too. We've nothing to fear about an introspective period of silence. Not in our daily routines. Not in our private worship. Not in our public liturgies. Jesus seeks us when we are the most vulnerable and he will not leave or ignore us. Eugene Peterson quotes one Nicholas Berdyaev, "In a certain sense, every single human soul has more meaning and value than the whole of history with its empires, its wars and revolutions, its blossoming and fading civilizations." So, Jesus comes to Peter

on that day by the sea. Jesus shows compassion to the throngs that are there to hear him because he loves them and wants them to know how much God loves them, too. Our baptismal way of life says the same thing about each human soul, about our human soul, our personal soul. God sees it as valuable no matter how vulnerable to disintegration.

Finally, when the fishermen and Jesus all came ashore, boats filled to overflowing with fish, what did they do? They left it all behind and followed Jesus. I find this curious. We're hearing today about 2007 being the favored year of "Christian prosperity living" from preachers all over the world and especially on TV. If this were truly an ethic of the church and of Jesus' teaching, the end of our Gospel lesson today would've looked more like Peter and his partners James and John hiring Jesus on the spot to be their guide to the good fishing holes, until they retired, and sold their partnership. They would've made sure Jesus worked for no one else; and sold his fishing prowess to no one else. What a business asset Jesus would be! And, they would've protected their Jesus-asset like the NFL protects home television viewing of the Super Bowl.

Instead, in awe of what had just happened, and, I think, in silence – afraid no more - they left all that favored prosperity and followed Jesus. They just simply walked away. Peter's faithlessness was overturned by Jesus. Peter was given new faith for the day at hand. A new identity: from now on, you'll be catching people. Peter's experience of the water that day, changed his life. Jesus issues the same invitation to us, too. Every day. And to everyone around us, too. Life in this baptismal water is pretty good. It is God's favor for us.