

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
16 July, Anno Domini 2017
St. Luke 5:1-11
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Peter certainly thought he knew something. He was an expert fisherman. He knew the best times. I'm sure he had his own secret spots on the Sea of Galilee. And so he knew that Jesus' request was complete foolishness. Wrong time, wrong place. It was an act of faith to go out again during the day, albeit, a faith that was still without any understanding. There must have been something in Jesus' preaching that convinced Peter to break out the nets that he had just finished putting away, something that made Peter go against every instinct in his body simply because this Jesus told him to.

And Peter wasn't disappointed. Aren't boats filled with fish exactly what he had been hoping for all night? Peter should have been thrilled with what happened. I imagine he'd even prayed to God asking that God would bless their efforts with a bounty of fish. But rather than bringing Peter joy, the nets overflowing with fish only brought Peter to his knees in terror.

One thing Peter definitely knew now was that Jesus is powerful. This wasn't simply beginner's luck on Jesus' part. Where before, Peter thought that Jesus was perhaps just a wise and eloquent master but completely naive when it came to fishing, now Peter realized that he was standing face to face with the God who created the fish, the sea, and Peter himself! But that wasn't good news. That's worse than the sinking boats! This is the God of the flood, the God of Mt. Sinai! This is the God who has seen Peter's thoughts, the God against whom Peter has sinned.

What we see in Peter is the reality that what you know ABOUT God is more important than simply knowing God. Knowing that God is powerful is not enough to save you or to bring you comfort. You certainly can go out in the woods in the evening with the light filtering in through the leaves and admire God's majesty. You can stare in awe across the open field as a powerful thunderstorm rolls in, filled with lightening and towering thunderheads and think "Wow! It is some God who can create and control this."

But what do any of those things actually tell you about God? Can they tell you anything about what this God thinks of you, how His heart is disposed towards you? Like earthquakes, powerful winds, raging fires, and sinking ships, these things only tell you that God is infinitely more powerful than you and could vaporize you any moment He chose to do so. And, as if that's not terrifying enough, like Peter, like Elijah, like Paul, you have grievously offended this all-powerful God. He has spoken and you have not listened. You have doubted His Word and His promises. You have dared to stand up to this God and tried to assert your own made-up authority and autonomy against His. Not only have you broken His commandments but then you have tried to justify it and even tell Him why the commandments are wrong.

As Peter quickly learned, God's power and majesty, when confronted honestly, are terrifying. When brought face-to-face with God's perfect holiness and majesty, the filthiness and ugliness our unholiness and our unrighteousness are put on full display and we have no where to run or hide to protect ourselves. God in His naked power leaves us with our naked sin that leaves us deserving only God's wrath and eternal damnation. That is not a God that can be loved or desired. That is a God that sinners can only hate, even though He is right and we are wrong. That God is nothing but judgment and death to us. Every twinge of our conscience, every rustling leaf is an ominous reminder of the death and damnation that hang over our head and we could only ever hope that God would just go away.

But Jesus knows better. He knows that Peter needs Him. He knows that you need Him. He knows that if He gives Peter what Peter asks, Peter will die. And so Jesus stays. He stood His ground there before Peter and drove Satan and death away from Peter with those four beautiful words - "Do not be afraid." Peter, like all of us sinners, needed God to be merciful, to stay with Him and be His refuge. He needed a God of mercy and gentleness from death. God's omnipotence was about to kill him. It laid Peter bare and exposed him as helpless and hopeless. It brought Peter to a true knowledge of himself. Every sinner needs this knowledge. Every sinner needs to taste the terror of death in order to bring forth cries for God's mercy and God's deliverance.

And that's exactly what Christ is and does. He is the deliverer who delivers us from the death we deserve. He is the foolishness of God which actually

saves sinners instead of destroying them. If you desire peace with God, if you long to be comforted, if your conscience is filled to overflowing with the guilt of your sin and you live in the terror of sinking beneath the waves of God's righteous judgment, then know this - God does not desire your death, He isn't pleased to simply give you what you deserve. The Lord Jesus stands before you as the one who drives out fear because He is the one that takes your guilt away.

Do not be afraid. Do not think that God's greatest power and majesty lie in His ability to destroy. The true power and majesty of God lie in His desire to save sinners from death. This is how God wants you to know Him - as the God who wants you to live, who wants you to have a clean conscience before Him, as the God who loves to pour out His mercy to you. He is the God who washes you in the blessed flood of Baptism in order to drown the sin that would drag you down into hell's abyss.

Only in Christ, is there comfort in God's power. Only in Jesus do we see that God's power serves His mercy. This Jesus is the impregnable fortress in which sinners can take refuge when their guilt overwhelms and threatens to destroy them. Fear has no place when the heart rests in Jesus. What is there to be afraid of? Jesus has met every last demand in the Law including it's judgment of you. He obeyed. He trusted. He was condemned. He was abandoned by the Father. He was raised. Do not be afraid. Jesus is what God wants you know of Him. He wants you to know that the Blood of Jesus was poured out for you. He wants you to know that your death and your sin, rather than you, has been swallowed up.

In Jesus, and only in Jesus, is God's power beautiful. If you really want to see God's power on full display come to the rail where the Body and the Blood of Jesus are served as the food of the soul or come to individual confession and hear the absolution spoken over YOUR sins without strings attached. Do not be afraid. Your sin will not kill you. It killed Jesus and He overcame it. He lives. And He stands in your midst to bring you safely through this world of judgment to the shores of everlasting life. Do not be afraid.

In the Name of +Jesus.