

Trinity V Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. + "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Our two readings speak to us of the peace and mission of the Church.

St. Peter tells us that the peace of the Church is founded on the reality that we all sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. Within that Christian fellowship, where Christ is Lord, we are to be of one mind and one heart. We have many temperaments, characters, abilities, vocations, estates and ministries, but in the knowledge and love of God we are to be one - of one mind and heart. And in this fellowship, we are to relate and love as sisters and brothers, acknowledging and honouring our spiritual bond in Christ our brother and God our Father. Finally, the peace of the Church depends upon each of us guarding our tongues, keeping our mouths

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shut. Peter warns us of the destructive power of our words, and as this is true in all families, it is most true in the family of God.

Our Gospel brings us a compelling picture of the mission of the Church, drawing all men to Christ in common obedience to his word. There is a beautiful and unexpected joy in the miraculous draught.

So in one reading we are taught about the peace of the Church and in the other of the mission. And we pray, in our Collect, that we in the church may joyfully serve God in all godly quietness. In this Diocese, in the Anglican Church of Canada, and I suspect in this congregation, there is a real need to reclaim the peace and mission of the Church, which is founded on Christ as Lord, and on his word being obeyed.

Both the fishers of fish and the fishers of men are not catching much these days. Both kinds of fishers may well whine, “Master,

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we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing.” But that phrase of Saint Peter is an echo not just of the disappointment of pastors, priests and preachers, but of many mission-minded laypeople, who have worked so hard to reach out to their communities with the saving love of God in Jesus Christ.

Yet more generally, Peter expresses a disappointment we all feel at times. Difficult disappointments come to us all. We may lick our wounds, wash our empty nets out in a quiet sadness. That sadness can lead to anger and despair. Our disappointments are even harder to bear, when they come after long and hard work. Listen to Peter again: “We have worked all night and caught nothing.” There may be a little despair and a little self-pity in his voice. Jesus says, “Launch out into the deep,” but we answer, “I’m too tired, we’ve tried that already, nothing will work, nothing helps, it’s no use. It won’t work.”

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What you and I are invited to do today is to take fishing lessons from a carpenter, and that goes against our pride. I want to give you three lessons to take home with you from that great catch of fish.

1. Sometimes our failures are a test of our faithfulness. Even when it doesn't pay off or feel right, will we be faithful? One lesson Peter learned, and we can learn for our failures and disappointments, is that God's blessings are not earned. We do and we must labour, but it is all his gift to us. We get bitter and angry because of self-righteousness, because we seek our wages instead of his grace. We are called to faithfulness, to trust and obey the Lord, and this does not always lead to success, especially as we imagine success to be.
2. Faith is so very important. It was faith which could imagine or hope for a reason in Jesus' command. It was faith that obeyed Christ, over and beyond common sense. Common sense is a great guide, but it will not bring you satisfaction or happiness.

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Common sense is so severely limited and limiting. Common sense says, that if you have fished all night and caught nothing, you should give up for a while, and certainly not take the advice of a journeyman carpenter. But faith knows and obeys in hope: “Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.” What is there in your life, that you need to say “nevertheless” to? What hurt or failure or disappointment do you need to acknowledge and use, as the occasion to re-commit yourself to trust and obey the Lord?

3. What God provides is beyond our imagining. It bursts the nets of our comprehension. Peter does not have any great success in bringing people to Christ in the Gospels, and he must have had many disappointments. But later, after these disappointments and his own deep failures, God will give him a miraculous catch of 3,000 souls at Pentecost.

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The first part of the message of that Gospel reading is: fear not. Don't be dismayed or overwhelmed or crippled by your failures and disappointments. Don't be afraid of the power of God in Jesus Christ, for he has come not to condemn you, but to save you. The second part of the message is that from now on, you will be catching people. The first part is the peace that we have with God, by faith in Jesus Christ. The second part is our commission to share that Gospel, and to draw others into the saving fellowship, the "net," of believers.

Is it too much to see in that Gospel story an image of the Church, of you and me, wallowing in self-pity and despair and not even trying to catch fish anymore? Jesus tells us two simple things.

1. Launch out into the deep. You are not going to catch fish on the beach; they are in the water. So we need to go out into the world, if we are to catch people. Too much of what we call

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mission is waiting for people to jump into our boat. Jesus calls us to launch out into the deep. What does that mean in this congregation?

2. Let down your nets. We need to both go out to people, and reach down to people, to meet them where they are. And the net we want them to get caught up in, is not this or that type of church or opinion, but the kingdom of God, the ark of salvation, the fellowship of believers.

So, fear not, launch out into the deep. Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? The peace of Christ will remove all fears. No one and nothing can take from you the joy of Christ, and no trouble or sorrow or disappointment or pain or difficulty, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Launch out into the deep and stop sulking on the shore! Amen.