

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 9, 2025

**“Master, we have worked hard all night
and have caught nothing, . . .”**

Work can be a tricky thing. For some of us it is actually enjoyable, one might even say life-giving. And that’s a true blessing. The rest of us wish we had jobs we look forward to, wish we had jobs that didn’t sap our spirits, jobs that didn’t make us count the minutes until our workday is over.

And while there are many reasons we may or may not like the job we are currently in, a common determining factor for many of us is simply whether or not we feel that our job is doing some good, making some sort of difference in our lives and that of others. In other words, we want to know, or better yet, see the fruits of our labors, see the results of our hard work. And when we don’t (or can’t) it can make our labors seem pointless, seem like drudgery, seem like a waste of time.

**“Master, we have worked hard all night
and have caught nothing, . . .”**

So says Simon Peter to Jesus after a long night of fishing, hours of hard work that left him exhausted and frustrated, frustrated because they had caught nothing. Jesus tells them to try again, to venture out into “deep water” and cast their nets. Unsurprising to us but shocking to Peter was the consequence of following their friend Jesus’ instructions - nets full of fish.

Peter had needed to be persuaded to try again, not wanting to put in the effort and see no results. Jesus, of course, had other ideas. I’m sure Peter was glad he chose to listen to Jesus (and not the voice in his head). His gladness was, however, tempered by feelings of unworthiness in the

face of what he could only consider to be a kind of miracle. Jesus counteracts Peter's comments with his now well-known declaration.

**“Do not be afraid; from now on
you will be fishers men.”**

And while we know that Peter (and others) chose to follow Jesus, we don't really know what he was thinking in that moment. Did he know what Jesus meant? Did he know what it would require? Was he excited? Fearful? Confused? All of the above?

And maybe most importantly, would he be able to see the fruits of his efforts, would he be convinced that whatever Jesus would ask of him would yield consequences that obviously would make it all worthwhile? Put another way, would this sort of fishing yield nets full of fish, or would the nets often appear to be empty?

When we read stories about these first followers of Jesus, it's easy to think that we have nothing in common with them. After all, they lived a long time ago. And their day-to-day lives probably looked a lot different from ours. And this is the biggie, they were actually friends and companions of Jesus.

Therefore, these were the people responsible for the faith that we embrace today, responsible for making sure the word got out, making sure people got to know about this Jesus, what he was like, what he said, the miracles he performed, and eventually, that he had died and was raised from the dead.

And for all this “work” they did on behalf of Jesus and the things that were important to him, we are eternally grateful. Without these first believers we wouldn't have a Church.

So who's responsible now?

It's easy to just lay all of it at the feet of Church leaders far up the ladder, easy to say it's only Church officials in high places that now are entrusted with making sure the Good News is still getting spread, still getting proclaimed to a world in dire need of good news.

But do we believe that is truly enough that a handful of people bear all the responsibility for whether or not Christianity thrives or withers, bear all the responsibility for whether or not our faith continues to change hearts, change minds, change the world? In other words, are there just a few "fishers of men" alive today, or are there many?

I think you know the answer.

My dear friends, when we hear Jesus speaking to Peter (and others) in today's Gospel passage from Luke, we must also hear him speaking to you and me, encouraging us, inviting us to embrace the same mission as his followers. Listening to him. Admiring him. Following him. Knowing him. Trusting him. All those things. And of course, making sure all those things are not kept secret, not kept private, not kept to ourselves, not kept hidden from those around us. In a very real sense, Christianity will flourish only to the extent we do what those early believers did - reveal to others the Jesus they had come to know and believe in.

But to do that, we have to be okay with not always seeing the fruits of our labors, not always seeing the impact our lives our words and actions are having on others, not always knowing how things will play out. In other words, sometimes it will feel like our nets are full, and sometimes it might seem like our efforts are in vain, feel that our nets are empty. Yet, we continue to fish, yet, we continue to move out into the uncertainty of deep waters anyway.

That I believe is the nature of the work we embrace on behalf of Jesus, the work we embrace as disciples. And whether we can see the difference we are making in the world or not, whether we can see the difference we are making in the hearts and minds of others or not, what's important is that

we simply continue fishing - fishing not with just any old net, but with the only kind of net that matters, a net made from the loving acts we do.

Any other kind of net won't do, won't accomplish what we hope to accomplish. If we use the net that says that we have all the answers and others have none, our fishing will be in vain. If we use the net that implies we are better than other people, our fishing will be in vain. If we use the net that somehow implies that God is on our side (and not on the side of others) or that God loves us more, our fishing will be in vain. If we use the net that doesn't leave room for doubt, our fishing will be in vain. And if we use the net that leaves no room for mystery, our fishing will be in vain.

But if our net is made of love

Well, the honest answer is that we won't know exactly what impact any particular act or any particular words will have on any particular person. That's just not possible. But we will be able to have confidence that Jesus will somehow bring about a net full of believers of all kinds, a bounty that will help the Good News continue to inspire and motivate and enrich people for generations to come. That work didn't end when those first believers left this earth. It continues with you and me.

So let's row out into deep waters and start loving more than we ever have before. Jesus might just surprise us with a miracle.