

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

### **Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**February 6, 2022**

#### **Psalm 138:1–8 (ESV):**

1 I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;

before the gods I sing your praise;

2 I bow down toward your holy temple

and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,

for you have exalted above all things

your name and your word.

3 On the day I called, you answered me;

my strength of soul you increased.

4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,

for they have heard the words of your mouth,

5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,

for great is the glory of the LORD.

6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,

but the haughty he knows from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

you preserve my life;

you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,

and your right hand delivers me.

8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;

your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Scripture Reading: Isaiah 6:1–13 (ESV):**

##### **Isaiah's Vision of the Lord**

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each

had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

### **Isaiah’s Commission from the Lord**

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

9 And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

“ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

10 Make the heart of this people dull,  
and their ears heavy,  
and blind their eyes;  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears,  
and understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed.”

11 Then I said, “How long, O Lord?”

And he said:

“Until cities lie waste  
without inhabitant,  
and houses without people,  
and the land is a desolate waste,  
12 and the LORD removes people far away,  
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

13 And though a tenth remain in it,  
it will be burned again,  
like a terebinth or an oak,  
whose stump remains  
when it is felled.”  
The holy seed is its stump.

**EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 14:13–20 (ESV):**

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

**Gospel: Luke 5:1–11 (ESV):**

**Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

5 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O

Lord.” **9** For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, **10** and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, **“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”** **11** And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

## **Sermon 6 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost**

### **“We Took Nothing”**

#### **Luke 5:1-11**

Dear friends,

In our Gospel lesson Jesus begins assembling His dirty dozen, and He begins with the dirtiest of the bunch, which is Peter and his fishing crew. Getting the band back together is all well and good, but what can we actually learn from this? I initially skipped this one, I was going to do Corinthians, but I kept glancing back at the Gospel lesson because I couldn't get the brief exchange between Peter and Jesus out of my head. Is this just a recruitment mission or is it something else? Jesus is here to change the destiny of these men, as Jesus changes our destiny. Jesus is here also to show the church – to show us – a core, fundamental truth, one that we often forget. You can try and you can try and sometimes there is nothing, but with Jesus even nothing yields something. Jesus never leaves His children empty handed.

There's not much to say on what happens before this, a few notes on Luke's style though. Luke has Jesus doing some work before He even gets around to assembling His disciples. Jesus has already been preaching and teaching, healing diseases, kicking out demons, all the things you expect from Jesus. In other Gospels this waits until the disciples are on the scene, but Jesus gets started early in Luke, and He's already shown His power. I don't know if this is important, but it's worth keeping in mind as we read what comes next. Jesus has already played His hand. The people are getting the sense that this guy is different from your regular traveling preacher, not just in what He can do, but in what He says and the authority with which He says it. It's a good frame for looking at just how Jesus chooses to approach His future students.

It begins with a boat. Jesus, being God, occasionally feels quite free to just grab whatever is at hand if it will help Him. In this case, Jesus needs some space, so He asks Simon for his boat, and begins teaching the people from that. Simon has been nearby for a while, so Simon is no doubt listening to this preacher who has just requisitioned his boat. After a while, Jesus turns to Simon. **“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”** **5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”** It was these words that grabbed me first. Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. How often is this the case in our world, brothers and sisters? We toil all night and we take nothing. Whether it be in our work that we do to earn our daily bread, or the work that we do as a church, we all have nights like this. We toil, we work, we do our darn part, sometimes we go way above and beyond, and in the end we have nothing to show for it.

This is exactly, to the letter, the curse pronounced on man specifically in the Garden of Eden. God tells man that, because of man's sin, the ground will not produce without a fight. Peter isn't a farmer, he's a fisherman, but that same curse is still at work. Before, work produced food. Now, sometimes all our work produces nothing. Remember that this was Peter's trade, and not a hobby. When the fish don't catch for us, we shrug and enjoy the outdoors. When the fish don't bite for Peter, he has nothing to sell and might have nothing to eat that day. Our sin means that we can do everything right and nothing can come of it. Whether you're fishing, farming, doing data entry or HR, or just trying to keep a halfway decent household, there are days where nothing seems to get anywhere. You work and you have so little to show for it, either in the results or in the money you make or whatever it is. We're trained to accept that as life the way it is, but the Garden of Eden reminds us it was never supposed to be that way at all.

Not just for us as individuals, but for us as church. Lord, we toiled all night, and took nothing. We loved the people that came to us, and they left. We raised our children well, and they're gone. We all did our part, and nothing happened. This is the cry of the church throughout the ages. Lord, we toiled all night and took nothing. None of it did any good. We tried to say the right things to get people to believe. We tried to love them. We

tried to be true to your Word, we tried to be good children, and we don't have anything to show for it. The church often feels like an uphill slog. We preach, we teach, we worship together, we show love, we show charity, and things just go the way they go, and it never seems like they go the right way.

You know what happens next, the nets are let down at Jesus' word, and the catch is huge. There is a lesson in this. Human toil, human work, is not beside the point, but it is not what makes things happen. It is not, ultimately, what gives you your daily bread in your life. You may work hard, harder than you ever have before, but that work will yield nothing unless God commands it. What do we pray to God? Give us this day our daily bread. God gives. If God doesn't give, it doesn't come. That's harsh. That seems unfair. But it reminds us of our place. We are children, looking to our Father to provide for all our needs. Okay, but what happens when He doesn't? What do we do when we toil and God does not allow us to reap? When nothing comes of everything we've done?

Peter shows us the way. **“8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”** Simon Peter has to see the miraculous catch before he gets to his knees and repents. You know better. We get down on our knees and repent no matter what comes our way. Peter teaches us that in blessing or in lack, in richness or poverty, in toil or in plenty, we are all sinful men, and God should depart from us. He shouldn't be here, giving us anything at all. Whether God gives or not, we repent and take the lesson of Peter from it. Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

Look at how Jesus responds. **“And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”** It's Jesus mission, and He sets us to it. No matter what you do in your life, it is Jesus who does it. Whether you take care of yourself or a spouse or a whole family, it is Jesus who sets you on that road, it is Jesus who makes your work fruitful and meaningful, it is Jesus who is being served by your work. Whether you work a job or are retired, it is Jesus who you serve. Same for us as church. When Jesus tells Simon he will be catching men, He sets the mission for the whole church. To catch

men, to snare them in the net of the Law and to pluck them out with the message of the Gospel. The task is as straightforward as you could ask it to be. Catch men. What Jesus reminds us, as church, is that the catch is up to Him. We drag the nets but He sends the fish, and no other. Sometimes that means a catch. A lot of times it means we take nothing. We drag the nets, He sends the catch. When the catch is fruitful, we praise and thank Him, repenting of all the sins we made along the way. When the catch is futile, we cry out to Him for mercy and He responds. Jesus sends the catch. Jesus sends the fish. Without Jesus, our work is nothing more than toil. With Jesus, even a night in which we took nothing is a win, because we did our job.

We can work and work and work as a church and it'll never change anyone's soul, anyone's heart, or anyone's destiny. Jesus in this story reminds us that our work isn't what does these things. We're the net men, dragging our dragnet, and what happens after that is up to Him. He doesn't treat Peter harshly for his frustration. He doesn't scold Peter for being tired and wanting to just end the day so he can start fresh tomorrow. He doesn't do that for you either. Let down the nets, and let me worry about the catch, even when the catch is nothing at all.

Lord, I toiled all night and took nothing. Lord, I waited for you and you never came. I prayed and you never answered. Lord, I just want to know it meant something. I just want to know it did something. Jesus' answer is the same. You worry about the nets. I'll handle the rest. He takes the work of Simon Peter and crew and He honors it, He esteems it, not just by giving them what they had labored for, but by using their work as part of His work. He does the same for you. He honors your work by making it part of His work. Whether it is in the church, whether it is in your families, or whatever your work is, you are part of Jesus, and so is your work. Jesus is there to put your work to excellent and perfect use, no matter what it is, Jesus just wants you to go let down the nets. Show up. Let Him decide what it means or what its all about. He tells you. He shows you. It means everything, because He is with you. Jesus told the disciples as much. I made it so you can catch fish. I made it so you can catch men. Jesus makes your work what it is, He makes you have the value that you have. He crucified Himself to make that possible. He doesn't

rate how successful you are, how much you do, what you do. You belong to Him. Let down the nets. He'll catch what He wants to catch.

He caught you the same way. He never lets go what He catches, even when it wiggles. Even when it gets tired. Even when it has nothing to offer. Depart from us, Lord, we are sinful men. Jesus says, nah. I'm not going anywhere. You are coming with me.

Amen