



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity

1 St. Peter 3:8-15 &
St. Luke 5:1-11

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Over these last five weeks the lessons have been showing us what it means to live out the life we have in Jesus. Again, that's the point of the lessons during Trinitytide. Over the first half of the year the Church tells us the story of our redemption as she walks us through the life and ministry of Jesus, from his birth to his cross. Now the Church shows us what it looks like to follow Jesus and to live as one of his people. And so we spent two Sundays looking at the love of God and what it means to live in his love and show it to others. The last two Sundays we looked at how the love of God works out in our lives in practical terms as *grace* and as *mercy*. And today the lessons call us to live in the *peace* of God.

These are all challenging things to live out. We accept the grace of God—that's usually the easy part—but then we fail to be gracious with others. (Usually because we forget that we too are sinners and that we live only by God's grace.) We accept the mercy of God, but we fail to show mercy to others. And God establishes his peace with us and gives us his promises of care and provision, but we still hold on tight to our worldly cares, our worldly problems, and look to the world to meet our needs. I'm not sure which is more difficult: to learn to love the totally unlovable people in our lives or to learn to truly live in peace, handing over all of our problems to God. These are hard things to do, but if we would grow closer to God and if we would display his love to the world—to draw men and women to Jesus—they're things that we *have* to do—they're not optional.

St. Peter wrote to Christians who were facing serious persecution. These people were living in a situation in which we'd probably forgive them for being not a little panicky and for their churches to be in a little disarray. People wanted to kill them.

But despite their hardships, look at Peter's exhortation to them in our Epistle. He says: **Finally, all of you, have unity of mind,**—the men and women of the world are divided and their approach to life is “every man for himself”. Instead, be united; have one mind—“the mind which was in Christ Jesus”. Have *sympathy* and stand with your brothers and sisters the same way that Jesus has stood with you. Show each other **brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind** (1 Peter 3:8). Model the humble love that Jesus has shown you as you deal with each other and especially as you deal with the world.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

Look at the example of Jesus. He came to bless us not by retaliating against evil with evil, but by allowing himself to be crucified. He who knew no sin died a sinner's death that he might pay our penalty. If Jesus had repaid evil with evil, if he had reviled when he was reviled you and I would still be dead in our sins. He returned evil with good and purchased our redemption, and now as we live in that redemption purchased by his suffering, St. Peter reminds us that we should live the same way that we may obtain God's blessing on the last day, when Jesus will finally say to us, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.” We shouldn't be surprised if we have to endure evil. It was Jesus himself who told us, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). “Blessed are you” and “great is your reward” when you bless those who do you wrong. This is what we prayed for in the Collect when we asked that we might “joyfully serve you in all godly quietness.” As St. Peter says in Chapter 2:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21-22)

And Peter goes on to back up what he has to say with some words from Psalm 34:

For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:10-12)

I gather that these verses from the Psalms spoke to Peter especially in light of his writing about peace and being peacemakers. Peter himself was an impetuous man who said what he thought and his mouth sometimes got him into trouble. He'd had something himself to learn about peacemaking, which is why I find these words of his especially comforting. If Peter took this lesson to heart and learned, so can I. There's probably nothing so opposed to peace as the tongue. I like the way Patrick Henry Reardon puts it: “Seeking and pursuing peace is nine-tenths a matter of keeping bad things out of one's mouth.”

There's not much that will escalate a situation more than responding to an unkind word with an even less kind word—and that's what most of are tempted to do when someone says something to us that we don't like. And, brothers and sisters, there's nothing I've ever seen cause more damage within the Church than the tongue. Gossip and unkind words will tear a church apart and utterly destroy our Christian witness faster than anything else, which is why we need to follow the example of Jesus, dealing with each other and our sins and shortcomings with love, grace, mercy, and patience. Gossip, slander, and hurtful and divisive talk are all things we do to attract attention to ourselves. “Hey, everybody! Listen to the juicy piece of information I have. I'm in the know!” “Listen to what So-and-so did. I'm sure glad I'm better than that! I'm sure glad I don't struggle with that sin!” We use sins of the tongue to build ourselves up and to attract attention to ourselves at the expense of others. But the Psalmist makes us ask, “Whose attention do I want to attract? The world's attention or God's attention?” Friends, the people of the world—even your brothers and sisters here—won't answer your prayers. The Psalmist

reminds us, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.”

It’s all a matter of perspective. When we cling to the things of the world or when we fall into sin, it’s because we’ve taken our eyes off of eternity. We start looking for the approval of the world or we start looking to lay up for ourselves earthly treasures. We forget that in the long-run it’s God’s approval we should be seeking and it’s God’s kingdom that we should be working to establish—and those two kingdoms, the world and heaven, are diametrically opposed. It’s one or the other. And so Peter tells us to seek for peace, even when we know that the world’s going to be at our throats for it. But again, what does that matter if we’ve got our eyes fixed on eternity? He goes on in verse 13:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

Why fear evil men? How much time are you spending struggling against evil and not trusting God’s promise of blessing? Peter asks, Who has any power to harm you, if you’re following the one man who truly is good?

And of course we say, “But Peter, Jesus himself said that we would be persecuted for his sake. How can you talk about blessing and not worrying and fighting back when we all *know* that we will face persecution for doing good?” And Peter says, “Of course I know that, but really, who can truly harm you? Who can touch a hair of your head while you are in God’s gracious hands. As far as suffering persecution for the sake of righteousness, that’s not harm, that’s the crown of joy in well-doing! If that’s the worst we can expect, then rejoice with me! He says in verses 14 and 15:

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.

Worry about keeping your heart in the love and fear of God, and you won’t have any need to worry about what the world may bring. “Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness” and God will take care of everything else.

Today’s Gospel gives us a dramatic illustration of the fact that God is, in fact, in control of the course of this world. It reminds us that when Jesus calls us to forsake all and to follow him—that when he calls us to be peacemakers in a world that hates peace—that we can trust him and that we can follow and obey him and not worry about the outcome.

St. Luke tells how Jesus was teaching at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He was a popular teacher and the crowds had gathered and it was getting crowded on the beach. There were two fishing boats pulled up on the beach—one of them Peter’s—and so Jesus got into Peter’s boat and asked him to take it out from shore a bit so that he could sit in the boat and teach the people from there. This isn’t what Peter wanted to do. He and his friends had been out fishing all night and hadn’t caught a thing. All he really wanted to do was finish washing out his nets so that he could go home and get some sleep. But Luke says that Peter did what Jesus asked him. Water has good acoustic properties and so Jesus sat there in the boat and talked to the people gathered on the beach. I can just imagine Peter sitting there in the boat behind Jesus, still working away at picking the garbage from his net, washing it out, and getting ready to lay it out to dry on the beach once Jesus was done commandeering his boat. Peter was no doubt listening to what Jesus had to say, but his attention was really on his nets—on his livelihood. How often are we just like that? We read the Scriptures, but our minds are focused more on what he have to get done today than on what God’s speaking to us through the inspired Word. We come to church on Sunday to worship, but our minds are focused on our plans for Sunday afternoon or for the rest of the week. How often do we sit at the feet of Jesus to learn from him, but it all goes in one ear and out the other because what we’re really focused on are the stresses, trial, and tribulations of life? “That’s great Jesus, but when can I get back to what I was doing?” We’re like Peter sitting there pulling bits of seaweed from his net as Jesus taught and just wanting to go home.

But Peter didn’t get to go home. Jesus finished teaching the people and instead of asking Peter to take him back to shore, he said, “Put out into the deep and let down

your nets for a catch.” Peter didn’t want to put out into the deep. His entire night of fishing had been a waste of time, but you can almost see him throwing up his hands in resignation when he says to Jesus, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” You can hear the exasperation in his voice: “Jesus, there’s no point. The fish aren’t biting. Trust me, I was out there all night...but just for you...” And I can see Peter casting his net. Not a real cast as if he expected to catch something. He just sort of half-heartedly throws his net out into the water—not too far out, because he was planning on immediately pulling it back in. Really, what’s the point of letting it sit out there? He wasn’t going to catch anything. But then Luke says: **And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 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.** (Luke 5:6-7)

I can’t help but think that Jesus had a love of ironic humour. There was Peter more concerned about his nets and his livelihood than he was about the things of God and now Jesus overwhelms Peter with his livelihood—so many fish that his buddies had to row out and help him and even then the boats were almost swamped by the weight of the fish they caught. They fought and struggled to get the fish to shore, and once it was all dealt with the reality of the situation sank into Peter’s mind: this wasn’t just some teacher, some rabbi—this was a miracle and only God could work a miracle like that. And so realizing suddenly that he was in the presence of the holy, Luke says that Peter fell down to the ground in front of Jesus and wailed, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Humility is the universal response of sinful man to holy God throughout the Scriptures. I like the way Isaac Williams put it: “So should it be with us when God opens His hand; it should humble us with the thoughts of what God is, and what we ourselves are. It should lead us to trust in Him to give us all things needful for the body, while we yield up ourselves more entirely to His service; but, alas! it has usually with us the very opposite effect—

we accept His gifts, and in His gifts forget the more the Giver of all good.”

How often is that true of each of us? We accept God’s gifts and then forget who gave them to us. Instead of living humbly trusting God, we take what he gives and continue to lead our lives for ourselves, trusting in ourselves and in the things of the world. Instead we need to be like Peter—falling at his feet in humble worship, accepting the gift, and trusting in him. Jesus gave Peter a dramatic demonstration that he would take care of him and it was as Peter recognized that that Jesus called him to the kingdom and to his work: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And that’s just what Peter and his friends did. They saw and they trusted and Luke says, “When they had brought their boats to land, *they left everything and followed him.*”

Now, Jesus doesn’t call all of us to be apostles like Peter and he doesn’t call all of us to leave our jobs and make the Gospel our full-time profession, but his call is to all of us. In Luke 14:33 he tells us, “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

This is the important lesson of this Sunday: You and I need to let go of our affections, our interests, and our anxieties from the thing of the world and fix them instead on Jesus Christ so that we can serve him with joy. In the Collect we prayed that “this world may be so peaceably ordered through [God’s] guidance, that [the] church may joyfully serve [him] in all godly quietness.” But in reality how often is it we who are trying to govern and order things so that we can achieve the ends we want? We say we trust God, but brothers and sisters, by the way we live our lives, trusting in ourselves, trusting in our things, trusting in our jobs and bank accounts we show that it’s just not true. How often, when things aren’t going our way, do we get stressed out and panic—as if God isn’t in control? Even when it comes to the work of the Church, how often do we run around with our hair on fire afraid of this or that? The government’s going to force us to perform same-sex weddings! The human rights tribunals are going to come down on us if we say or do the wrong thing! Our finances are terrible. How are

we going to keep the doors open? And what does that communicate to the world about our faith? Is God sovereign and in control or not? Is God being true to his promise to take care of his Church or not? Those should be easy questions to answer, but by our actions we might wonder—and the world might wonder too.

Look again at those closing words from our Epistle. St. Peter exhorts us and asks, “Who can harm you if you are zealous for good? And if you do suffer for the sake of righteousness, considering it a blessing. Don’t be afraid. Do not be troubled. Sanctify God in your hearts—honour him—and he will take care of you. Fear him and you have no need to fear anything else. Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and he will work everything else out for your good and for eternal blessing.

As Christians we should have a very different perspective on suffering than the world does, because we have an eternal perspective—we know that God is working out all things for good despite what it may look like in the short-term. Think of all the situations in Scripture that would have looked hopeless from a worldly way of thinking, but that God worked for good. If Jacob hadn’t been forced to run away from his home and his brother’s murderous rage, he never would have been met by God in the wilderness. Take away the afflictions of Joseph, and God’s people would have starved to death during the famine in Canaan. If Pharaoh hadn’t made the Hebrews slaves and treated them cruelly, they would have been content to stay in Egypt. That would have meant no Moses, no Mt. Sinai, no manna from heaven, no law and no Ten Commandments. If David hadn’t been persecuted by Saul, we wouldn’t be able to read about his forgiving heart in the Psalms—or the about how he made God his “tower of strength” and his consolation. It was because of his being put in prison and because of the hate of the Jews that St. Paul appealed to Caesar and made his trip to Rome, spreading the Gospel all the way there. And of course, it was only because of the hatred of the world for Jesus that he was crucified and purchased our redemption at the cross with his blood. God always turns the persecution of the saints into something good. That’s why Peter can exhort us and ask, “Who can harm you?” and why he

can say, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” Sanctify and honour the Lord God in your hearts, and he will take care of you. If God is for us, who can be against us? Or as Job asked, “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”

We need to take today’s collect—today’s prayer—to heart. When trials and tribulations come, pray that prayer and be reminded that you have no reason to fear. And as we put our fears to rest, we can be about the kingdom work that God has given us—we can truly be the peacemakers that God has called us to be, sharing his peace with the world, first and foremost because we’ve experienced it ourselves.

Finally, let me say, God’s already given us the end of the story—and that ought to give us great peace and great confidence as we seek first his kingdom and to do his work. The saints of God we see in the book of Revelation—the ones that we read who will overcome the armies and forces of evil in these last days—notice that John describes them as being without weapons—without swords or spears or shields—and yet they follow the Captain of their Salvation, “clothed in fine linen, white and pure” which is said to be the righteousness of the saints. As the angel said to John, these are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; it is him they follow, the Lamb of God; it is by him they conquer and are victorious; and all their strength is this, that as he was, so are they in this world.

Please pray with me: “Almighty God; we pray that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered through your guidance that your church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”