

WILLING TO GO

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

February 7, 2010

8:30 and 11:05 a.m.

(Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany)



ST. PAUL'S

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Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13), Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; and Luke 5:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Later this afternoon, about 100 million people in America will watch the Super Bowl. It has become a national ritual and spectacle. Friends and family will get together to have a party and watch the game. Some will be more excited about the party, some about the game, and some about the new commercials that will air trying to sell us automobiles, beer, and car insurance, an interesting combination, as well as the latest technology and who knows what else. Some, of course, will be totally uninterested in the whole spectacle.

Perhaps it is worth a social note that this is the first Super Bowl where there will be what might be called a social commentary commercial. All American Quarterback, Tim Tebow and his mom will air an anti-abortion spot, sponsored by Focus on the Family. Some are very supportive; others are not. Some in both groups wonder what other social commentary spots might air in the future on various topics and wonder if this is the place for it. But this is America, and CBS and the NFL decided that if they can afford \$2.5 million for 30 seconds, they will air it. There's always more going on at the Super Bowl than just a game.

The game itself should be exciting with the New Orleans Saints seeking to become first-time winners in a city that needs a break, versus the Indianapolis Colts with Peyton Manning, whose father, Archie Manning is a former New Orleans Saint. Perhaps the game will turn on a miraculous catch by one of the wide receivers who scores the winning touchdown.

In our scripture reading today, there is a miraculous catch of a very different kind and for a very different reason. Jesus helps the fishermen in the story make a miraculous catch of fish after they had fished all night and caught nothing. You know this story; you've heard it before. Both Matthew and Mark include the story of Jesus calling disciples beside the sea, though the reference to the miraculous catch is omitted.

Curiously, John's gospel includes the story of the miraculous catch of fish at the instruction of Jesus as a post-resurrection story. You remember the story of Jesus cooking breakfast on the seashore as his disciples fished. It is as if in that context, Jesus is reminding the fishermen again, who have gone back to doing what they knew to do to make a living, that they still have a higher calling. The language in the text today from Jesus is, "From now on, you will be catching people."

My Men's Wednesday Morning Bible Study group is convinced that the language in the old King James Version is much better. It says "fishers of men." They had their own social commentary. Both Matthew and Mark take a middle ground in our New Revised Standard Version translation and say "fishers of people." Both are figurative of course.

The point is that Jesus is calling people — men and women — who can come to understand that there is more to life than just making a living. Don't we all want to believe that at some level? There's more to life than just working all the time. There's more to life than having lots of money. There's more to life than football games. There's more to life than fighting wars or politics or banks that are too big to fail. There's more to life than all the little things we sometimes get caught up in.

In the text, after the best and most productive day at work these fishermen had ever had, they were ready to leave it all and follow Jesus. They were willing to go. It is curious that Jesus helped them to experience the best day fishing they had ever had and then said to them, I can lead you on an adventure that is better than this, and they were willing to go. What does that say about people like you and me? I think it says that deep down inside, all of us believe that there's something better than the routines we allow ourselves to be captured by.

Was it Thoreau who said, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation"? Something like that must have been going on when Peter and James and John left their livelihood and everything familiar to them and just walked away and followed Jesus down the road. They were willing to go. There was a sense of unworthiness, like Isaiah, who didn't offer any excuses, but said, "Here am I. Send me."

What is the equivalent of that scenario for you and me today? Nobody here today is just going to walk away from job and family and everything familiar and hit the road as some itinerant preacher, though some here have responded to a call to ordained ministry and knew not where that could lead. Yet if Jesus showed up long ago in the midst of everyday life and in effect said, "Let me show you how to make all of this more authentic," then we who believe that Jesus is risen from the dead must also believe that he still shows up today. Where might he be asking you to be willing to go? What are the deep waters away from the safe, cautious edges for you?

In a sense, Jesus asked Peter and James and John to do what they'd already done: to fish again where they had already fished and caught nothing. The decision to follow what Jesus asked them to do in a relatively small matter led to a decision to follow Jesus in a major way. Fishing again in deep waters led to a journey as a dis-

ciple. Maybe it is that little decision to try again where you had given up that might make a big difference in your life. Change the priorities of how you spend your time. Get up tomorrow morning with a different attitude about someone or some circumstance. Give some significant relationship another change. Focus more on the good and less on the bad in your experience. I don't know what it might be for you. I do know that it is little decisions that sometimes lead to significant differences. And I know that Jesus still shows up one way or another in the midst of everyday life. Faithful decisions in small things can lead to significant differences in the things that really matter.

Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and the other disciples were afraid and confused and felt very unworthy, but when the Lord asked, they were willing to go. These texts are about invitations to follow Jesus. There's more to life than making a living, more than games or politics or other shallow water endeavors. Jesus invites you to life in the deep waters of meaningful discipleship. Whatever he asks of you, I hope you are willing to go. It is the most significant decision you can make.