

SERMON: Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland, MA – February 7, 2010

Homily for the Annual Parish Meeting – Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland – The Rev. Dr. Frederick P. Moser, Rector

As you may have noticed, the setting of today's gospel is far different from that of the last two weeks, in which Jesus famously read from the prophetic scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth and taught the people of his home town. Today he teaches not in the synagogue with all its trappings of tradition and the baggage of old, established relationships, but out in the open air by the lakeshore, up north beside Lake Gennesaret – the Sea of Galilee – where the crowd is large and the people are eager to hear words that will open the future for them as wide and bright as the horizon above the waters and fields that sustain their livelihoods. They press so close that Jesus has to get into one of their boats and teach from out on the water.

The water, though, hasn't yielded what it should – the fish that anchor their way of life in this part of the country. It is not that the people haven't worked hard; they have worked as hard as they knew how. "Master," Simon says, "we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." What a poignant verse. How often do we feel that way? We put in everything we have, it seems, to a project; we work as hard as we know how, but we don't get what we wanted. It isn't for not trying, but it feels just then that all we did wasn't enough. We return to the shore and we do at least what we know how to do: we wash our nets, and maybe think of trying again another day, but for now the long night has taken too much out of us; we can't hardly think that if we went back things would possibly be any different.

It is there at that point, where we have come to the end of our own resources, that we have the chance to hear God calling us back to try again, but this time differently – this time to do so with God. "Put out into the deep water," Jesus says, "and let down your nets for a catch." The "*deep*" water, Jesus says. The gospel, I have to believe, means more than a measure of the distance between the surface and the lake bed. The deep water is the place of serious and sustained engagement with God: as mystery and unfinished journey, as challenge to our assumptions about the lives we think we are entitled to, and as vulnerability to the radical reordering of our priorities in favor of God's priority and preference, especially for the least and the poorest in our world. No simple Sunday answers for Sunday only Christians in this place; no rehashing of hashed-over habits from days gone by. Here in the deep water is the meeting place with the God who can truly help – the God beyond the god at the end of everything left on the lake shore, the God whose beginning is in the end of everything we sought before to do without God or by lesser gods, and realize now we can only do in a new way with the true God.

SERMON: Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland, MA – February 7, 2010

Homily for the Annual Parish Meeting – Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland – The Rev. Dr. Frederick P. Moser, Rector

“When they had done [what Jesus told them to do] they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break – they even had to signal some partners in other boats to come and help them, so great was the catch.” Luke’s story can be nothing less than a metaphor for the church and the mission to which it is called. It is hardly that there is no more need and nothing left to do. It is that the need is so large and the things to do so many that we can’t possibly do the tasks before us without calling upon our partners in other churches and faith traditions, and even some outside faith traditions, for their help in accomplishing what God has put before us to do. The one essential thing we need for ourselves is faith in our own Lord and Savior, to get into the boat and go out to the deep where the hard but bountiful work needs to be done.

The end of everything is the beginning of God, and the beginning of what it really means to be a disciple and a community of faith in Jesus Christ. So Luke is showing us this morning in a story of death and resurrection, trust and discipleship. How serious, how uncompromising is God’s call in the Gospel this morning? The last verse tells us. “[This time],” it tells us, “when they brought their boats to shore, they left *everything* and followed [Jesus].” “They left *everything*,” even, the Gospel is telling us, the overwhelming catch of fish they had just taken. They left that catch of fish for the people of Capernaum to enjoy; they didn’t even try to take it with them, but they went on with Jesus to a new place with different needs and other people to serve. So God is calling us today to encounter Christ anew in the deep water, and join Christ’s journey at the end of everything we used to know and the beginning of all that God has put us here and is calling us to accomplish as ministers of reconciliation in our time and place.