

February 10, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

When I was reading this Gospel lesson it made me think about the people, I grew up around. It was a different time, and a different way of looking at the world. It was a mill town – a steel mill and a railroad car manufacturer anchored the place and most people worked in these places. My uncles owned businesses, there were your usual number of medical people, a couple of lawyers, a banker or two and a raft of teachers. In nearly every way, these were the most ordinary of ordinary people. And what this place, and hundreds like it, held in common with the people we hear about in today's Gospel is their spectacular ordinary-ness.

When we read the Gospels one of the things that always pops out at me is the spectacular ordinary nature of all of the main characters. The bit players are the mighty, the powerful and the educated. The ones who move the story – dare we say even Jesus himself – are generally painted as so common it's almost embarrassing. Jesus himself comes from a little place of little reputation. The people he gathers around himself are these provincial fishermen scratching out a living each day with a net and a boat. We read later that they have the accents of the country folk. The crowd that follows him are the people of places who, in the telling of the stories, remind me of the people I grew up around.

And one of the things we see in these stories, in the ones like the Gospel we hear today, is that Jesus is able to re-focus their lives, their vocations, their hopes and dreams even, into something broader than they were imagining. In Jesus, these Galilean fishermen were suddenly no longer provincial day-workers scratching out a living for themselves and their family. Suddenly, they were people on a mission. Their day-job had a mission and a purpose that transcended what they saw on the surface. They would fish, and fish mightily, and catch a lot more fish, and a lot of people to boot. What I find interesting is that Jesus doesn't ask them to stop fishing. He does help them frame the picture in a new way and with a broader purpose. When we listen to Jesus and hear the stories of his engagement with people, with communities, I never really hear stories of how Jesus gathers up all of these people to march on Jerusalem, or

Rome. Instead, nearly all of the people we meet are people who are left in their places – in their communities and in their jobs.

Jesus does, repeatedly, reshape the ordinary nature of the lives of the people around him not by taking them out of their place or even their work, but asking them to see their work as an extension of his work, as an extension of the inbreaking of the intersecting of heaven and earth. What I remember seeing in the lives of the people I grew up around was a sense of the purposeful humanity of their lives, lives that didn't so much accomplish famous things or heroic things, but decent lives reflecting on who they thought and believed Jesus to be in their lives and the world around themselves.

One of the challenges of contemporary life is that for a long time we have, so to speak, separated the sacred from the secular. And what I mean by that is we are frequently encouraged to see our lives compartmentalized into a religious sphere and a “this-worldly” sphere. And, we must acknowledge, that when people frequently let these worlds flow into one or another, it is often done with rancor and confrontation, guaranteed to land one in the nightly news, and cause confusion and a sense of hopelessness in those who are standing by to watch. Yet, in today's Gospel, we see Jesus helping a bunch of fishermen understand how their ordinary lives have meaning and purpose centered in his – Jesus's – image of humanity. Simply put, holiness isn't found in church. Holiness is found in the world.

We've known for a long time that holiness isn't confined to a place, even this place. Holiness is to spread out over the world, flooding it with God's presence. It included fishing in boats in Galilee, laying bricks and casting steel in Butler, Pennsylvania, and a myriad of things in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

What do you think it looks like to you?

Amen.

Pastor Erdos  
Epiphany 5  
Luke 5:1-11