

Epiphany 5C
Luke 5: 1-11
7 February 2010
Christ Church

Every summer, Mr. Burruss would take our entire family fishing on the Chesapeake Bay. My Dad and Mr. Burruss did a lot of business together – Mr. Burruss owned a vault company in Richmond. The fishing trip was his way of saying thank you.

We loved Mr. Burruss, and we loved going fishing on his boat. It was the highlight of our summer. My Mom would pack a picnic that included all of our favorite things to eat. On special occasions such as this, we could have all the soft drinks, cookies, and cupcakes that we wanted. (Thankfully, Mr. Burruss had the good sense to stay away from the choppy waters of the bay.)

After loading all the provisions on the boat, we would head out into the river that led to the bay. Mr. Burruss turned on his short-wave radio to ask other boaters the best places to

fish that day. Once he found the right spot, he set the anchor and cut the engine. We couldn't get our lines in the water fast enough. We spent the entire day out in that boat, pulling in one fish after another – it was glorious. All of us, even the children, felt like tournament fishermen. Everyone, that is, except my father.

The lore in my family was that our Dad was particularly susceptible to bad luck. Actually, this was not just lore – it was the truth. My father *was* unlucky. This was not only true with fishing; his bad luck ran through card games, and even his favorite sports teams.

Daddy was a big Atlanta Braves fan. Thanks to Ted Turner's Superstation, he was able to watch most of the games on TV from our home in Richmond. He would sit up late on a summer night, shelling butter beans, excited when the Braves took the lead -- and then the Braves would lose in the 9th inning. So, Daddy changed his routine. Whenever the Braves had a lead late in the game, he would go to bed in during the

8th inning so as not to jinx his team. Next morning, he would read the sports page and find out that the Braves had won.

When Daddy turned 80, David and I gave him a letter, written to him personally, from Bobby Cox. The letter read: “Dear Joe, I hear you’re a big Braves fan, so I’m writing to congratulate you on your 80th birthday. We appreciate your loyalty to the Atlanta Braves. And by the way: Thanks for *not* watching!”

My Dad called himself Joe Bifflick – the guy in the Lil’ Abner comic strip who walked around with a black cloud over his head. Since my Dad’s name was Joe, it fit perfectly – especially on the one day a year that we went fishing.

I remember one famous fishing trip, shortly after David and I were married. We were having a storybook day. David had never been fishing on the Chesapeake, and he and my brother-in-law Bruce were hauling fish in one after another. On the other side of the boat, Daddy was getting no bites at all. So, he moved to David and Bruce’s side and cast his line in

between them. Not wanting to get their lines tangled, David and Bruce moved to the side where Daddy had been.

Of course you know what happened. The fish stopped biting on Dad's side of the boat and starting biting on the side he had just left.

I wonder if Peter fishing on Lake Gennesaret felt a bit like my Dad.

In today's Gospel, Peter, James, and John have been out fishing all night long and have had terrible luck. In fact, they've caught nothing – not a single fish in their net. For them, this is a serious matter. They're not on a pleasure trip. Fishing is their livelihood: catch no fish, and you have nothing to sell and nothing to eat.

Imagine how very tired Peter, James and John are! They haven't been casting modern fishing lines into the lake. All night long, they've been lowering a large, heavy net into the water, lifting it out again, and repeating the process many

times over. They are ready to go home and go to bed. In fact, they've already started putting their fishing gear away.

I wonder, are they annoyed when Jesus asks to use their boat as a platform to preach? Certainly, when Jesus tells them to lower the nets into the water one more time, Peter balks.

Luke's story suggests that Jesus is not some meek bystander who asks Peter's permission to enter the boat. Jesus' authority is clearly evident. The weary fishermen do what he tells them – even though his command seems preposterous.

Through the miraculous net full of fish, Peter recognizes Jesus as His Lord – and he is afraid. It's an appropriate response, considering that Peter has just encountered his God.

This is an important story in the Gospels, with many aspects to it.

First of all, it's a story about timing. Peter, James, and John expect to catch fish in the night – but it doesn't happen when they want it to. The catch happens in God's time.

This is also a story about abundance. It tells us that in Christ, we have all that we ever need. Note the contrast: the before and after – the empty nets and the full nets.

And, this is a story about calling. Jesus chooses ordinary fisher folk to be his disciples. He does not go down to the Temple to recruit the learned. He does not go into Jerusalem to tap the leaders, who have management experience and earn large paychecks. Jesus seems more interested in those who are open – those who are willing to work with Him.

Early that momentous morning on Lake Gennesaret, these three fishermen-peasants make the biggest catch of their lives. And it all hinges on their willingness to obey, even against their logic. To persevere, despite their doubts. To be ready, despite their weariness. To follow God – even though they've only just met him.

So, as each of us goes about our equivalent of fishing in Lake Gennesaret this week, let's visualize a worn-out and

discouraged Peter putting away his nets, never dreaming that his life is about to be changed forever. Let's remember that in the midst of our work, our failures, and our successes, Christ meets us, and calls us to follow.

When we pay attention, when we align our hearts and minds to the Way, God fills the nets of our lives with all that we need – with all that we could ever want to live joyfully and faithfully in Christ.