

***“When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”***

A Homily delivered by Len Friesen at Waterloo North Mennonite Church

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Luke 5: 1-11; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: 1-11.

The verse that has most captivated me in today's readings is actually the one you just heard, which happens to be the last verse in today's Gospel reading. I have wondered over these past weeks if it might just be the most terrifying verse in the bible for us happily acculturated Mennonites. It's so terrifying, in fact, that I don't want to start with it.

Let's turn instead to today's passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, written by Paul within two decades of Christ's earthly life. This makes it one of the oldest writings in the New Testament. Paul wrote it to a small church in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth, one in which the dominant culture was anything but Christian. Indeed, one commentary says that this letter was written to, and I quote, “a less than perfect Community struggling to follow Jesus in a multi-cultural, multi-religious world.” That pretty well summarizes Waterloo North's context doesn't it? In fact it summarizes every other church and parish in this community and our world.

It's no wonder, then, that much of Paul's letter is a combination of admonition and instruction, as in a listing of dos and don'ts. For example, some of the oldest teachings of the church, from morality to church practice, are found here. Today's reading comes as Paul wants to end his Epistle with words of strong encouragement. To that end, he reminds the Corinthians of the truly Good News that should motivate this community to persevere in faith and action. He has no time for fluff and so gets right to the heart of the Gospel. Paul assures his listeners that their faith is not in vain because Christ did indeed die for their sins in accordance with the scriptures. He was indeed raised from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in accordance with those same scriptures. Many then saw our resurrected Lord, he continues, including Paul himself, later on the road to Damascus. In the passage immediately following today's reading Paul continues on to say that Christ's resurrection means that we, too, will be resurrected in Christ one day. Why it's already a done deal, for in vv. 24-5 God the Father has already

placed every authority and power under Christ's feet, including, presumably, the authority of Hollywood, Facebook and Justin, both Bieber and Trudeau.

This is truly good news. This is truly a God worth following in word and deed, and this takes me back to our Gospel reading and the verse that I think is so terrifying for modern-day Menno's like us. (*Anyone know what the verse is that I'm referring to?*) The story here is simple enough. The crowds have pressed in on Jesus for they long to hear the word of God, which is presumably His to give. We first see Jesus standing on the side of a lake. He then gets into a boat and asks the boat owner, a young man named Simon, to push out a bit further so that Jesus can better address the crowd. After he finishes we have the incident with the fish, whereupon Simon speaks for all of us when he falls down at Jesus' feet and declares: "*Go away from me, for I am a sinful man.*" The declaration makes it clear that Simon knows that he is sinful but Jesus is not, a certain declaration that Jesus is God, for only God is without sin.

And Jesus's response? It is to calm Simon, and to promise him that his calling from now on will be to catch people, not fish. That call for us to be Christ's evangelists to our neighbours in K-W would be the most terrifying part of this reading if we still believed that there was no salvation apart from Christ. But instead I think what secretly terrifies us most is Peter's response, and those of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to Christ's invitation. For we read simply in v. 11 that "*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*" Terrifying, isn't it.

Here's what makes it particularly so for us. I think that our temptation in our multi-cultural setting is not to follow Paul and proclaim that Jesus is Lord of the whole world. I think that we're more inclined to say instead that, at most, Jesus is Lord if you think he is Lord, which is not saying very much. In time, we become uncomfortable talking about Jesus as Lord at all, which means we'll likely stop seeing him as the one who died for our sins, the very Good News that our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians proclaims. In time we might not see ourselves as sinners anymore, so why would we need a Savior? A little while longer and we might prefer to see ourselves as followers of the earthly Jesus only. We come to talk about Jesus always in the past tense, and as distinct from God. If you're not sure about this, ask Mary how many drives home I've

ruined from church services here and there when I've lamented how Jesus was only ever referred to in the past tense, and always as somehow distinct from God.

The problem with Luke 5: 11, of course, is that it exposes how far we have fallen short as followers of this earthly Jesus we've created, and how much we're each in need of a Savior. For who of us has followed the first disciples in leaving everything behind to follow Jesus? Who of us has set aside our pensions, our savings, and our homes? Surely all of us would rather hedge our bets, and all the more so if the earthly Jesus we have conjured up is really a dead Jesus, with no real power over our lives or our world.

But Jesus isn't dead of course. He who made us, he who died for our sins only to be raised from the dead by his heavenly Father, is still the eternal Lord of the universe, and through space and time he continues to call one and all with the simple invitation to follow him. And however imperfectly we managed to follow Jesus yesterday, He still comes to us anew every morning with the same invitation to leave everything behind and follow Him alone.

If you're hearing my voice there's a good chance that you've been baptized as an adult, and if so you have already proclaimed at least once that you will follow Jesus as Lord for He forgives you your sins. As I pondered these texts over the past while I couldn't help but think that there will be one more final time when Christ will call each and every one of us to follow Him. It will be when we die, for what is our dying but an invitation for us to leave everything behind and follow Christ alone, through His death and ours into a resurrection from the dead that is His alone to give, because He alone is the way?

So it is that at the beginning of our lives, and at the moment of our last breath, and at every moment in between our Lord and Savior steadfastly calls us to leave everything behind, including the sins that bind us, and follow him. His call for us to follow Him never ceases even though he knows how weak-kneed and half-hearted our following often looks. Even now the Christ who knew us before we were born longs to be our Light, even as he is already and forever the matchless, eternally radiant Light of the World. This is the Gospel. This is truly good news. Amen.