

Consider That You Might Be Wrong

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

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Community of Joy Lutheran Church

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

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I. Most of us are pretty confident people. When we think we know something for sure, for certain, we don't have many doubts about our knowledge of the suspected outcome of the situation. We often don't even consider another outcome or possibility. We think we are right. It actually comes quite naturally to self-assured people.

A. Well, it was the Fall of 1998. I was the pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Branson, Missouri. My wife, Cheryl, and my daughter, Tasha, were still in Columbus, Ohio. They stayed there for the first year of my ministry in Branson because Tasha was a senior at Bexley High School and we didn't want to move her in her senior year. So, I'm by myself in Branson (well - "by myself" with a dog and two cats).

B. It was the time of year when we change our clocks - coming off of "daylight savings time." I was very conscientious and remembered that we "fall back" - meaning that we change 10:00 o'clock to 9:00 o'clock. I changed all of the clocks in our house and I even changed the one in my red Ford Ranger pick-up truck. You need to know that I normally arrive at any worship service at least one hour before that service - so, for a 10:00am service, I would normally be there at about 10 till 9.

C. So, on this particular Sunday morning I pulled into the parking lot of our church and was shocked to see many, many cars. Normally I'm the first one to get to church. As I saw all of those cars - I thought to myself, "I

can't believe all of these people forgot to change their clocks. They've all arrived here over one hour early!" I parked and went in - still expecting to be able to "set all of these people straight" regarding the correct time. As I entered I came upon some very nervous folks - telling me that the service was supposed to start in less than ten minutes and they were wondering if I was going to show. Finally, it dawned on me that maybe I was the one who was wrong about the clocks. I had mistakenly set all of my clocks back one week early. They weren't the ones who were wrong - it was me!

D. Have you ever had anything like that happen to you? Maybe not quite as dramatic or involving so many other people, but a situation in which you just absolutely knew you were right - but it ended up that you were not right - you were actually wrong! That condition seems to worsen with age. There was a time when I was younger that if I remembered something in a certain way - I could count on that memory being absolutely correct, no if's and's or but's! That is no longer the case, but it took me awhile to fully realize that change. So, based on my "clock experience" in Branson, and some classes I've attended as a pastor, I decided to put a little note over my office door. So now, as I leave my office - if I look up - that note says, "Consider that you might be wrong!" It helps me not be so "cock-sure" that I always remember everything just exactly how it happened. It also helps me realize that maybe I don't actually know everything about everything. It helps me listen better to others, and possibly respond in a more understanding, caring manner, even when I don't seem to remember the event or the conversation in the same way as the person I am talking to.

E. So, you might find any/all of that somewhat interesting, but you could rightly say, "What in the world does any of that have to do with today's gospel text?" That's a good question. My response is this. I think it's quite possible that Peter (and the other fishermen disciples) might have

wanted or needed a small plaque nailed to the mast of Peter's boat which said that same thing - "Consider that you might be wrong." Why? Well let's examine this gospel text and see why I might say that.

II. We are probably all pretty much familiar with this story. Peter and the others have fished all night - not caught anything - but then Jesus says "go back out now and fish some more." They do as Jesus requests - they catch more than a boatload of fish, and then Jesus says, "From now on I want you to fish for people."

A. I tend to think that we don't really get some of the important interactions from this story. Luke tells it quite simply and we just hear it and say, "That's pretty interesting about the boat and the big catch, but the important thing is that Jesus said, 'Fish for people.'" That's such an unusual sounding command, that we spend a lot of time trying to figure out what that really means and we most often don't look closely at the other dynamics of this passage. Well, let's look more closely today.

B. Let's start with that 1st verse. It says, "... the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God." That made me wonder - have we ever "pressed in" on anyone to hear the word of God? That actually helps to set the scene. There were so many eager listeners there with Jesus that he decided to get into a boat and preach to them from the sea (lake). The text then says, (Jesus) "... saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets." So, let's think about that a little bit. We have several professional fishermen who had fished all night and had caught nothing. They were cleaning their boats and their nets in preparation for their next fishing attempt - which certainly wasn't going to be right away, otherwise they wouldn't have been cleaning everything. So, these guys are tired - they are most probably frustrated. They are pros and they know what they are doing, but they had

caught nothing. We could assume that the last thing they wanted to do was to go back out and (probably) waste more time not catching fish.

C. We are told that Jesus got into one of the boats (the one belonging to Simon) and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. We just assume that was O.K. with Simon. Maybe he wasn't finished cleaning the boat and this was just going to extend the time required to get it clean and ready for their next outing. Maybe he was just totally exhausted from "fishing all night" and he wanted nothing more than to get home and get some rest. So, maybe he thought - O.K. it'll probably just be for a little while as Jesus preaches to the people - then we will be able to go home and get some rest. But, not so. When Jesus finished preaching he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (Luke 5:4).

D. Let's remember that the disciples were not really sure who this Jesus was - they certainly did not yet see him as the Son of God. So, they have this carpenter telling them - professional fishermen - that they should try again, in the deep water. We are told that Simon Peter said, "Master, we have fished all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." That's what he said. What do you think he was really thinking? My guess would be something like this. "Are you kidding me? We know what we are doing. We've fished this lake for years and years and we can tell you - from experience - that it would be useless for us to go back out right now, and certainly not to the deep area. You really don't know what you are asking us to do. This will certainly be a waste of our time and energy (and we don't have much energy left right now)!" That may have been what he was thinking, but for some reason he did as Jesus asked. What are we told happened then? It says, "... they caught so many fish their nets were beginning to break. So 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” (Luke 5:6-7). This was the catch of their careers. They would never forget this day. This would be the best “fishing story” that they would tell their families and friends for the rest of their lives!

E. Peter realized all of this too. He was the one who often “didn’t get it” or “he got it wrong,” but in this case he realized pretty quickly that this was unbelievably special. Peter was able to realize that something powerful had just happened because this catch was not just “lucky” or fortunate - this catch was miraculous, and the “man” that made it happen was a “miracle worker.” He knew that he had sinned by not really believing that anything good was going to come out of this fishing venture. He acknowledged that sin immediately when he returned to shore by falling at Jesus’ feet. He also acknowledged God’s presence in Jesus and in this miraculous catch. The text says, “When Simon Peter saw it (the catch of a lifetime), he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me for I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8). Do you think that Peter might have said to himself - after this experience - “next time maybe I should say, ‘Peter, consider that you might be wrong?’”

F. The text says that Peter and the others “were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken...” (Luke 5:9). They didn’t expect this ending. They probably expected to catch nothing and they would have (somewhat) nicely (but maybe even a little angrily) said to Jesus, “That’s O.K. That was a nice idea - a good try, but we could have told you that we wouldn’t catch anything.” We (and the disciples) know that God is all-powerful, but none realized that God would be involved in helping with a catch like this one. We often think we know better - better even than God. I think we “trump” Jesus’ request and ideas all of the time, because we feel like we know better. We live in the year 2010 and it is much different than 30A.D. We understand our situation better than Jesus, because he didn’t live in a society like ours. Maybe we all need to say (especially if we seem

to be going against Jesus' will), "I must consider that I might be wrong."

G. So, what happened next? Maybe we would think that the disciples would be really excited about their future prospects as fishermen. They now had an unbelievable ally. Maybe Jesus would see to it that they would always have substantial catches - from now on. Their careers as fishermen should be on the upswing and they might have been excited about getting on with their fishing. But, what actually happens? Jesus says (paraphrased), "Follow me and I will now make you fish for people." And, we are told, "They left everything and followed him." (Luke 5:11). Wow! That's pretty hard to believe. They dropped everything and followed Jesus.

H. These are the six words that finished this story - "they left everything and followed him." Aren't those six words pretty shocking? If we were told to pick six words to finish this story - I don't think it would have been those. Maybe we would say, "They realized Jesus was very special." Or, "They thought Jesus was Spirit-Filled." Or, "They cleaned their nets and rested." None of those endings are as stunning as the real ending - are they?

I. In the end, Jesus is trying to help all of us realize that God uses regular sinful people (like Peter and the disciples - and like us) to help and comfort others. We might think - Jesus can't use me, I'm not good enough, I don't know enough, I'm afraid. If you think that you might want to say to yourself, "Consider that you might be wrong." The fact is - God does want to use us - us plain, normal folk. So, maybe rather than saying, "Consider that you might be wrong," we could instead say, "Realize that God is always right." And that "right God" wants us to serve humankind and to reflect God's love to all around us. Let's do it! Let's really do it! Amen.