



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday July 1, 2018 - Trinity V

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for our sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing, nevertheless, at thy word will I let down the net.”
St Luke 5:5

The Old Testament reading for today, Genesis, Chapter 17, verses 1-8, offers a surprising comparison to the Gospel. The Gospel is set on a boat in Lake Genessaret. With four of those fisherman men who would become chief of the Apostles. The lesson from Genesis is God's appearance to Abraham at his 99th year to proclaims a Covenant to provide Abraham and Sarah with a son who would become the first generation of a great and holy people of God. The scene of the Genesis encounter is the desert, directed to an old man and his barren wife. The promise is to fill the womb of the old woman, as opposed to filling the nets of the fisherman. At first glance, it would seem impossible that these stories could be more different. And yet, they are closely related and important for our lives today.

Simon Peter and Abram share a common futility and impatience with their spiritual mission. Abram had been promised a son who would be the first of a people of God who would be as numerous as the stars, but as he got older, he and Sarai, his wife, wavered in their faith. They took matters into their own hands, and used Sarai's slave, Hagar, as a surrogate to provide a son because Sarai continued barren into her old age. When God did not act in their expected timeframe, they returned to self-reliance, doing God's work for Him.

St. Mark tells us that Simon's brother Andrew was one of the two disciples that left John to follow Jesus when the Baptist witnessed that Jesus was indeed the Lamb of God. After spending the night with Jesus, Andrew made it his first order of business to find Simon Peter to tell him that he had found the Messiah. It is clear that both brothers shared a passion for the coming Messiah, perhaps both even had known that they had a calling, but as time dragged on, and John proclaimed he was not the Messiah, only Andrew persisted in the search.

We find Simon Peter, back at the nets, returned to his old ways, the way of man, when the promise of the Messiah fails to happen in the timeframe Simon Peter expected. It was this tendency to fall back to his old ways when things don't happen according to his expectation that leads Jesus to repeat this miracle after the Ascension, confronting Peter to ensure that he will stay the course to feed the flock that Jesus entrusts to him.

Simon Peter and Abram share a similar result from their return to their own efforts, each is the head of an empty vessel. For Abram, the empty vessel is Sarai's womb. For Simon Peter, it is a fishing boat filled which had failed to return any subsistence. Each then hears the voice of the Lord, and the voice asks them to obey a command that would seem to be futile. The Lord asks Abram to trust that he will father a child with Sarai. Jesus tells Simon to cast his nets back out, in the same lake, and the same spot that had failed to yield even a single fish the whole night before.

The response of both men is grudging and doubtful obedience. Abraham wondered how a hundred year old man and a ninety year old woman would bear a child. Out loud he says, that's very nice Lord, but in his heart, he says, I'll settle for having you bless Ishmael, the child of my own will and scheming. The Lord persists that it will not be Abram's way, but His own, and Isaac is conceived. You can almost hear the weary incredulity in Peter's voice when Jesus orders the nets back into the water. "Master, we have toiled all night, and taken nothing, nevertheless, at thy word will I let down the net." It is hardly a "how high" response to our Lord's command to Peter to jump, but Peter does obey.

In response, because they obeyed, even grudgingly, where there was no rational hope to believe, they each encountered a miraculous filling of their vessel. Sarai's womb is filled by the life of the promised son Isaac. Simon Peter's nets are filled to overflowing, with a catch so abundant it threatens to sink his boat, and requires him to call his partners, James and John to help. By their obedience, each of them becomes the Lord's man instead of their own man.

It is clear that these stories, which at first seemed so unrelated, are in truth deeply connected. But now we have to move on to the more difficult task of relating the stories to our own lives. The difficulty does not come from any mental gymnastics required to adapt the stories to modern times, the difficulty comes because when we understand the stories correctly, we have to examine our lives, convict ourselves for our own lack of faith, and become obedient, even if only grudgingly and doubtfully obedient like Abraham and Peter.

We regularly describe our lives today in the same cynical and futile terms as Abram and Simon Peter. Our relationships are not fulfilling and satisfying, our work and careers are stalled, we are not appreciated by our peers, and we don't seem to be seeing the fruit we expect in our Christian walk. We know that our lives are supposed to be blessed by Jesus, and we might even believe that some day our lives will actually be grace filled and

fruitful, but today, we are frustrated. So, we have seized control of our lives from Jesus and taken it back into our own hands.

We all want Jesus to step in and call us like He called Abraham and Peter, but isn't it telling, that both had return to the same efforts that had once been fruitless before they were called to their new names and new vocations. The Lord didn't respond to their desire to change the conditions of their world immediately. Instead, He blessed what had once been futile, simply because these men were obedient, and returned to their labors under the command of the Lord, instead of in charge of themselves.

The consequence of this Gospel for our own lives becomes clear. Like Abraham and Peter, we have been renamed and reclaimed for the Lord at our Baptisms. But like Abram and Simon Peter, we prefer to manage our own lives, to keep the responsibility, and to do things our way.

If we want to have grace in our lives, if we want our lives to be fruitful, we have to believe that God can fill our lives, no matter how remote and hopeless our personal situations may seem. The promise realized by Abraham and Peter is held out specifically for us as well. St. John tells us that "if we believe in the Name of the Son of God, and have confidence in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, that he will hear us, and that whatsoever we ask, we will have the petitions that we desire of Him." 1st St John 14-15

When Jesus tells us He will give us anything according to His will, He is not telling us we can have a yacht or a vacation in Maui. He is promising us that when we ask Him to help us do the work that is in accordance with His will, He will bless us and we will of necessity bear fruit. Through faith in our lord Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit we must dare to ask God to make our lives fruitful and then have patience (faith) to obey His will for us until His grace is made manifest in our lives.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.