

Is faith something that sits still or is faith something that follows? The answer to that question, Christians, is an important one, because it makes all the difference in the world. Because if we think of faith as something merely that is sitting still, thinking of it like an insurance policy,--something that will help us out in the future but doesn't actually do much for us right now--when hard times come--and they will come--I don't think we're going to be very well prepared for them. We will not know how to deal with the reality of the world and the reality of a world which hates Jesus. But if faith is something that follows, Christians, it is a faith which follows after Jesus, which seeks him above all things. And because it seeks him, it cannot be caught by surprise, because all that has happened to Jesus is going to happen to us too. We know that because we are in Jesus, we have strength and security in the day of trouble.

We see an excellent example of this in our reading for today, Christians, in the person of Peter. His life up to this point and also his life after this point teaches us something of what it means to have a faith which follows. Because Peter at the time when we meet him here in Luke chapter 5 is a young man. He knows who the Messiah is. He's looking for the Messiah. But he hasn't yet met Jesus. He doesn't know who he is. And so he's trying to carve out his life and to do the best that he can in the circumstances. And he has a pretty comfortable life, because when we meet him here in Luke chapter 5, it says that he has a boat as a fisherman. That doesn't mean that he's incredibly wealthy by any means, but it does mean that he's not poor either. So he's the kind of young man who has a pretty comfortable life in front of him. And in fact we're told in other places in the Gospels that he's married. He has a wife that he's going to take care of. Maybe children, we don't know. But at the very least, probably extended family, people that he needs to support. And with the good job that he has, he can do that with hard work and dedication.

And so to take care of his family and to make his living, he decides, "Well, I need to go out this night and to fish and try to bring in as much as I can, because that's how I'm going to make my money." And so he goes out in the middle of the night to catch as many as he can. Now you have to understand something here. This is not pleasure fishing. This is not fishing with a rod and reel either. Peter would've had to fish with a net, this heavy, fiber-made net that he would have to drag in with his fellow workers every time he wanted to catch something. It's backbreaking work, and he's been at it all night, because he figures this is the best time to fish. I can probably find something. But he's disappointed. He doesn't find anything, doesn't catch anything all night. And so you can imagine him probably a little upset going into the shore as the morning is rising to take care of his nets. Because he has to clean them now, and he has to mend them right now. He can't put it off, because otherwise he's not going to have a job for very long.

And as he is going about the work of mending, Jesus comes. And Jesus has with him a great crowd. This crowd has come to hear him speak. And Jesus comes to Peter and he asks him if he can use his boat as a kind of floating pulpit, to go out a little bit away from the land so that he would better be able to speak to the crowd that has followed him. Peter agrees to this, because, after all, this isn't that unusual. Teachers at that time very often would wander around like this, proclaiming the word of God to a crowd, whatever

crowd wanted to hear them. At the very least, Peter figures, he'll have something to listen to while he's mending his nets.

But something about Jesus changes Peter. There's something different about the way that he speaks. Because as Matthew tells us after the sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks as one who has authority and not as one of the scribes. But Peter can't quite put his finger on it just yet. He's impressed by something about Jesus, but he's not really quite sure what. And because he's impressed, when Jesus asks him to go out into the deepest part of the lake and to cast out his net, Peter agrees, even though it would've been foolish to him. Because if nothing else, you're going out into the deepest part of the water, a place where you're not very likely to catch fish at all. And we've worked all night, Peter is figuring, and we didn't catch anything. Why would this be any different? It seems foolish to him. But because he is impressed by what Jesus has been saying, he listens. "Master," he says, "we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word, I will let down the nets." That word "master" shows the state of Peter's heart. Because "master" here is not master in the way that we would call Jesus master. Master is a term of respect, a very serious term of respect. He is impressed by Jesus, but that's about it. And so he says, "Master, I will listen to what you say." He goes out and he casts out his net.

But what a surprise Peter was in for when he casts out that net! Because as soon as they cast it into the deepest part of the lake where they reasonably expected they weren't going to catch anything, they catch a catch of fish unlike anything they had ever experienced in their entire lives. More fish than two boats would be able to hold, because we're told that as they drew all of these fish in, both of the boats were virtually sinking under the weight. This was a miraculous catch, nothing short of the work of God. And that's why Peter finally gets it. His term of "master" has changed to "Lord." He now knows who he is standing before. But like so many of the prophets who have come before him, because he recognizes that he is now in God's presence, he's afraid, afraid because he feels his own sinfulness. Oh Lord, if you only knew half of the things that I have said and done, you wouldn't want anything to do with me. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But Jesus looks at him, and he loves him. He says to Peter, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men." It's as if he had said to Peter, "Yes, Peter. I know who you are. I know everything that you have done, and even everything that you will do. But I forgive you and I love you. So, come. Follow after me, and I will show you the way to life." And Peter goes, Christians. He goes after Jesus, even though he's not really sure what that is going to mean. Because as he follows after Jesus, he would continue on to do many things, even denying his Lord at the very lowest point of his life. But the same Peter who denied Jesus three times on Good Friday is the same Peter who would go on to confess Jesus three times in the book of Acts before the very same chief priests and scribes that had put Jesus to death. And according to the traditions that we have been handed down from outside of the Bible, Peter would even go on to be crucified for the Gospel which he proclaimed. He became like Jesus even in his death, so that he glorified him in everything. But I think, Christians, at this moment in Luke chapter 5, Peter doesn't quite know everything that's going to happen. He doesn't know that he will end up eventually on a cross. But what he does know is that Jesus has called him, and he will

follow after him and trust him, because Jesus cannot lead him astray.

The reason I bring all of this up today, Christians, is because we too are in a similar situation to Peter. We are facing a world which is becoming openly more hostile to the Gospel. We have lived up to this point in a nation and in a time when it's been relatively quite easy to be a Christian. We could get along just fine. Our faith didn't cost us much. But now we are entering into a time when our faith will begin to cost us a great deal. Let me give you some examples. Shaun King, the leader of Black Lives Matter, has recently called for the open destruction of the statues of Jesus and of churches, because he says they represent white supremacy. It is a world which is becoming quite honest in his hatred of Jesus. We have reporters, news reporters on a national level, saying they're not telling the truth per se, but their truth, their own perception of things, the way that they see the world. But isn't it interesting that a world which is so willing to tolerate multiple viewpoints of the truth, as it says, cannot tolerate the one who calls himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Just look at the NFL for example. The NFL which refuses to let players pray before or during games, but now has very little trouble or qualms at all about letting people have all kinds of political messages or say political messages, because that's what it seems is most important. Or anything that we struggle with, or that we face in our world today. Companies, for example, who will try to force all kinds of things upon us, especially last month which they proclaim to be "pride month." And virtually every major corporation you can think of plastered its own logos with symbols of homosexuality, because that is the world that we live in, Christians. And people are beginning to lose their jobs, even relatives of people, simply for holding the wrong opinion.

We live in a time when it will cost us a great deal to be a Christian. And if we treat our faith as simply an insurance policy, as something that will help us only in the future, it's going to be very difficult to stand. But Jesus says to us this day the same thing that he said to Peter, Peter, who was facing just as hostile and uncertain a future as we. He says to him, "Do not be afraid. The world has hated me and is going to hate you too. But take heart. I have overcome the world." When we are in Jesus, Christians, we have no reason to fear. We have no reason to wonder what our future is going to hold. Even if we are crucified with Jesus like Peter was, Jesus will never forsake us or abandon us. It's going to cost us a great deal to be Christians in these days ahead, and some of us may lose our comfortable lives, our jobs, and everything that we held dear, but "those who have left behind father and mother, sister and brother, and lands and animals for my sake," Jesus says, "will gain a hundredfold in this life and in the life to come." Trust in Jesus. He is the one who has the victory. And no matter what this world says, Jesus reigns as King. Trust in him, Christians, and cling to him, for he is your Lord who will not forsake you in your day of trial.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.