

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, July 5, 2026

The Epistle, 1 Peter 3:8-15 - The Gospel, St. Luke 5:1-11

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Today's lessons provide a meditation on obedience and Christian vocation. In the gospel Jesus gave Peter a command—"Go fishing again"—even though Peter was worn out from a night of fishing and had already cleaned the nets. Peter responded: "I don't want to. But I will because you say so." The miraculous catch required Peter's cooperation.

Peter obeyed because he trusted Jesus. His faith took precedence over his fatigue and his natural human logic—it didn't make sense to fish at this hour. This is always the test of faith. Will we trust God and do what he says when we don't feel like it and it doesn't make sense according to normal human logic? This takes us back to Genesis. The forbidden fruit looked good. It was desirable to make one wise. It made no sense not to eat it—except that God said not to.

The epistle exhorts us to practice behavior that is consistent with our baptismal vocation. "Be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing."

St. Peter calls this behavior a vocation: "Knowing that you were called to this." Baptism gives a vocation to practice love and non-retaliation. We are called to do the right thing, even when others do the wrong thing, for two reasons. First, we are called to maintain our innocence. In Christ, our sins are forgiven. We are called to hold on to our justification and not let the world draw us back into the cycle of retribution, guilt, and judgment. Second, we are called to be witnesses for Christ. When we repay evil with good, people can see Christ in us.

The exhortation to repay evil with good is followed by a quote from Psalm 34 that connects obedience to our prayers. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry" (Ps. 34:15). When we faithfully practice love and non-retribution, God sees us and hears our prayers.

The opposite is also true. Our prayers will not be answered if we lack faith and refuse to do what we are called to do. If we ask God to help us and bless us, God will reveal the behavioral things we need to change in order to receive God's answer and blessing. The call to faith and obedience will be the first answer to our prayer. If we respond like Peter, this will be the first step to a new way of life.

The gospel is the story of the initial call of Peter, but it reveals a perpetual pattern for the life of prayer. Jesus spoke general words to the crowd; then he then spoke a particular word to Peter. When we gather for the Eucharist, there is a general message contained in the liturgy, lessons, and sermon. But God will call each of us to respond with faith and obedience in a specific way.

We can think of our obedience and vocation on two levels. First, there is the general call to observe the moral commandments and boundaries. We do not need to listen for God's voice to determine whether we should worship an idol, act maliciously, commit adultery, lie, cheat, or

steal. We are all called to avoid willful acts of sin. If in a moment of weakness we fall into sin, we are called to confess, receive forgiveness, learn, grow, and lead a new life in the future.

Second, God calls each of us to do particular things that pertain to our unique personalities, gifts, and opportunities. We are called to love particular people in our spheres of influence in new ways; to use our unique gifts; to give generously according to our resources and circumstances. God speaks specific words to each of us, calling us to fulfill our Christian vocation in distinctive ways.

The second part of our vocation is more challenging. It is not always clear what we are called to do. For example, how should I love someone who rubs me the wrong way? Should I try to avoid any contact and, thus, avoid all potential conflicts? Or, should I make overtures to connect and work for peace? The answer might be related to my natural tendencies. If I am a peacemaker who always tries to smooth things over and avoid conflict, perhaps God will call me to create space and do nothing. But if I am naturally difficult and combative, God may call me to act in a new and reconciling way.

Faithfulness to our vocation means living in a relationship with God that involves an ongoing conversation. It also requires growing knowledge of ourselves. We need to be aware of how we typically resist the challenge to love and, thus, how God wants us to grow. If we do not let God's word challenge our weakness, our religion will become self-justifying and our spiritual life will become stagnant.

This highlights the importance of getting counsel from mature Christians whose insight can help us see things we cannot see by ourselves. If we only listen for God's word directly from the Bible and in personal prayer, we will naturally filter what we hear through the lens of our comfort and preference. This is why connection to and accountability to the body of Christ is essential to obedience and our Christian vocation. As Ephesians says, "Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God" (5:21).

This does not mean that every random piece of advice from a fellow Christian is God's word to us. It does mean that mature brothers and sisters in Christ who know us and are not caught up in our own blinding anxiety can offer us wisdom from God that we cannot see and hear on our own. When a person is certain that he or she is being called by God to do something but is unwilling to get counsel and be accountable, this is always a big, red flag.

Our Christian vocation begins with baptism and with our initial experience of conversion of the heart. But God is continually calling us to follow him in new ways. If Peter is our example, then God's call to obedience will typically require us to do things that are uncomfortable and seem illogical. If God's word doesn't challenge our current habits and patterns of thinking, how can it change us and make all things new?

However, if Peter is our example, the result of our willingness to be challenged, to believe and obey in new ways, will be an abundant blessing equivalent to the miraculous catch that the nets could not hold. Thus, the call to follow Jesus is always both a challenge and a promise. As Psalm

95 says, “Today if you will hear his voice harden not your hearts.” And as Psalm 34 says, “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry.”