



Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 6, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Before he died, Billy Graham was returning to Charlotte after a speaking engagement and when his plane arrived there was a limousine waiting to transport him to his home. As he prepared to get into the limo, he stopped and spoke to the driver. "You know," he said, "I am 87 years old and I have never driven a limousine. Would you mind if I drove it for a while?" The driver said, "No problem. Be my guest!" Billy gets into the driver's seat and they head off down the highway. A short distance away sat a rookie State Trooper operating his first speed trap. The long black limo went by him doing 70 in a 55 mph zone. The trooper pulled out and easily caught the limo and he got out of his patrol car to begin the procedure. The young trooper walked up to the driver's door and when the glass was rolled down, he was surprised to see who was driving. He immediately excused himself and went back to his car and called his supervisor. He told the supervisor, "I know we are supposed to enforce the law, but I also know that important people are given certain courtesies. I need to know what I should do because I have stopped a very important person." The supervisor asked, "Is it the governor?" The young trooper said, "No, he's more important than that." The supervisor said, "Oh, so it's the president." The young trooper said, "No, he's even more important than that." The supervisor finally asked, "Well then, who is it?" The young trooper said, "I think it's Jesus, because he's got Billy Graham for a chauffeur!"

I love the story but the author gets it wrong. Jesus should always be the one in the driver's seat.

We meet Jesus at the Sea of Galilee today and Jesus is preaching. ⁴ *When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."* ⁵ *Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."*

I should have stopped one verse before. After Jesus invited Peter and the other disciples to let down the nets and after Peter argues with Jesus. "Master, we have worked all night long." I can almost hear Peter whining – tired, exhausted from a long night of work resulting in nothing – no catch – nothing to show for all the effort exerted over empty nets. We have all been there. We know the lines so well because most of us have used them at one time or another.

I prayed all night.

I followed all the rules.

I did exactly what I was supposed to do.

I did exactly what you told me to do.



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And it did not work. It did not work.

My brother died. My daughter left. They gave the job to someone else. The doctor said there is nothing else they can do. I got fired today.

We can try to do our very best on our own. Every-so-often we get it right but more-often-than-not, we fail. We try. We struggle. We pretend. We break. We get exhausted. And then Jesus somehow shows up. When we least expect Jesus to arrive – he is there. Ready to help. Waiting to be acknowledged. Always loving us and praying us and hoping us into the life God wants for us. And even when we know – when we feel – when we actually believe Jesus is right there by our side – we still believe we can do it better.

It is a bit like the man who as a newly qualified EMT came across a terrible road accident on his way home. Jumping from his car, First Aid case in hand he rushed to the body of a victim lying on the side of the road. Pushing the person aside who was attending to the injured woman, the man announced, “Stand back please, I am a qualified EMT!” Following all his newly-learnt rules he proceeded to bandage and splint for all he was worth. Many bandages and much iodine later, the person whom he had pushed aside tapped him on the shoulder and whispered in his ear, “When you get to the part where your training says, ‘Call the Doctor,’ I am here behind you.”

⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ 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. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Peter recognized his lack of trust, even as he let down the nets. Notice I said “lack of trust” not “lack of faith.” When the nets were filled and the catch of fish gathered, Peter gets on his knees acknowledging Jesus as Lord. “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” No Peter, just a broken child of God who finally met Jesus at the water’s edge after a long night of struggle. When Peter confesses his lack of faith – Jesus does not let him fall down. “Simon, do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” I could just as easily put my name in that sentence. “Christian, do not be afraid.” Linda, do not be afraid. Paul, do not be afraid. Edwin, do not be afraid. Each and every one of us – who stands in fear at one time another in this life – Jesus speaks these words to you. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says. “I am with you. Always.” Carry that promise into tomorrow my friends. Jesus is right by your side – this day. Everyday. Forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.