

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today we are celebrating “Word of God Sunday”. It is a good time for us to reflect upon how we first heard Jesus speak to us. When did we become aware of his invitation to come to know him and follow him?

How the first disciples of Jesus came to know him and begin to follow him is described in different ways by the Gospel writers. In Matthew and Mark, the first disciples are called to follow Jesus before they knew anything about him. In John’s gospel John the Baptist plays a big part in pointing his own disciples towards Jesus. Luke’s gospel today tells a different kind of story about the call of Peter to follow Jesus. Luke gives time for Peter to come to know a little bit about Jesus before he begins to follow him. Peter probably would have been there when Jesus cured his wife’s mother. If he wasn’t there, he would have certainly heard about it. He may have seen Jesus cure many people who came to him for healing. And now he sees Jesus as the teacher who is so popular that he needs some space so that he is not crushed by the crowd. He turns to Peter to give him that space. He uses Peter’s boat as a pulpit.

When Jesus had finished speaking, he turns to Peter again and asks him and his companions to go out into the deep water to lower their nets. What would you or I have done? Knowing that we have been out all night without

catching anything, would we have had the faith of Peter to yes to that request? Peter did. And even at this point in the story he shows his deep faith in Jesus. “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but if you say so I will pay out the nets.”

Peter was able to see the fulfilment of Jesus’ word. They caught so many fish that even with the help of their companions their boats could hardly hold them without sinking. How Peter responds to this is very much in the way that the ancient prophets responded to the God who called them to speak in his name. “Leave me Lord. I am a sinful man.” Perhaps you and I have said something like that when we have been aware of our sinfulness and our unworthiness to act in the name of Jesus. But Peter is not so much talking about his moral state, but more about his human condition. He stands in awe before the power of God made visible through Jesus. He expresses our unworthiness to be in the presence of God. But Jesus responds to Peter as the angel Gabriel responded to Mary. “Do not be afraid!” We need to hear that before we can hear what Jesus says to us next. We need to be assured that it is OK to be in God’s presence before we can hear what God calls us to do or to be. “Do not be afraid, from now on it is people that you will catch.”

In the second book that Luke wrote, the Acts of the Apostles, we see the fulfilment of those words of Jesus.

But for now, it was enough for Peter to trust that Jesus would be faithful to his word. “Then bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him.” Peter shows his faith and obedience to Jesus’ word by leaving everything else behind. As we listen to Luke’s Gospel this year, we will notice how much detachment from material things is in his eyes a mark of being a true disciple of Jesus.

What is happening in us as we listen to this gospel? Perhaps we are thinking about how we came to know Jesus and began to follow him? Perhaps we are thinking about the people who influenced us and helped us to look closely at Jesus so that we could come to faith in him? Perhaps we are thanking God for the faith that our parents shared with us? Maybe it was our spouse who taught us to believe in Jesus? Maybe there were moments in our lives when Jesus seemed to sneak up on us and showed himself to us in unexpected ways. When did we leave behind our childhood faith and begin to believe as an adult? When did the Scriptures become alive for us? Can we say that we now know Jesus as a friend, someone that we talk with easily each day? If we can say that, how did that happen?

In the Acts of the Apostles and in two of Paul’s letters, we hear how this great apostle became a man who could believe in Jesus. For Paul it was a very dramatic

conversion, but he needed something like three years, out in the desert, to know what to make of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Only then did he make contact with Peter and the others and begin to take up the call to be an apostle. He talks about all that today in his letter to the Corinthians. “I am the least of the apostles; in fact, since I persecuted the Church of God, I hardly deserve the name apostle; but by God’s grace that is what I am, and the grace that he gave me has not been fruitless.”

You and I can say that too. At times we may ask why we were given the gift of faith when others were not. We may ask why we belong to the Church and others do not. But like Paul we can say, but by God’s grace that is what I am. And we can ask God every day to help us to let God bear fruit in us. We can ask God each day to be even more open to the grace and the love that God longs to share with us.

In a few moments we are going to ask God’s blessing upon those in our community who share God’s word with us in different ways.