

Trinity 5 (2024)

A little song I remember from Vacation Bible School opens with the words:

*Tell the stories of Jesus I love to hear . . .*

*Scenes by the wayside  
Tales of the seas,  
Stories of Jesus,  
Tell them to me.*

Well, we find one such stories in today's Gospel.

This 'tale by sea' took place beside the lake of Gennesaret (better known as the Sea of Galilee).

The story is so vivid you can almost hear the water lapping upon the shoreline and feel the mist on your face as Jesus begins to address the crowd from Peter's fishing boat.

Just to place the story in context, it took place as Jesus was just beginning His public ministry and assembling His band of twelve.

The account opens with: **“The people pressed upon him to hear the word of God.”**

We shouldn't rush past these words, as they are full of instruction.

Jesus had already begun His public ministry, and His fame was spreading. Those coming out to hear Him were for the most part ordinary people from throughout the region of Galilee.

It had been roughly 400 years since the last of the Old Testament prophets. There had been, as it were, a famine in the land of the word of God. No wonder people were hungry for it and coming out in droves to hear Jesus.

These ordinary people stand in stark contrast to religious leaders in Judea whom the Wise

Men consulted at the time of Jesus' birth. You remember the story, I am sure.

When the Magi came and enquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. These religious leaders gave them the correct answer, "In Bethlehem of Judea." They knew their scriptures.

Yet – and this is the irony – they never went to Bethlehem.

There was no hunger on their part for the Word of God, the Word of God here being Jesus Himself, the Incarnate Word.

The eagerness on the part of the ordinary people to hear the Word of God in today's passage and the disinterest of the religious leaders at Jesus' birth should cause us to assess our own response to the Word of God.

In which camp are we? Those eager to hear or those with other priorities?

If a local church is being true to its mission, if the Word of God is being publicly read and faithfully preached, we should be like those told about into today's Gospel . . . those who pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God.

What I am suggesting is that as Sunday approaches, there should be expectancy and excitement.

When the day arrives, like the psalmist of old we should say: **“I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the LORD”** (Psalm 122:1).

We Christians come together on Sunday to enjoy each other's company . . . that is certainly important, especially in these days when so much business is done online apart from any physical presence of other human beings. We

human beings were made for incarnate interaction.

But we gather on Sunday for a more important reason as well . . . to have an encounter with the living God . . . to hear and experience His Word.

**“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”** is Jesus’ pledge to His people (Matthew 18:20).

A sign outside a church read: **Seven days without God makes one weak . . . w-e-a-k.**

It may be a lousy pun, but the point is well taken. Seven days without worship robs one the power necessary to live out the Christian faith in the world.

This encounter with the Word of God is not only good for our personal interiors, but for the

nation. The nation where the Word of God is recognized, eagerly sought and laws are made under it is blessed, as Psalm 33:12 tells us:

**“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”**

This morning we anticipate Independence Day. As we do so, it is good to be reminded of the importance of hearing the Word of God in this larger context, as it relates to our national life.

President Woodrow Wilson understood this importance. In a speech delivered on May 7, 1911, he said:

**“America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of the Holy Scripture.”**

Jimmy Carter likewise understood the importance of faith in our national life. In June 1976, he told reporters:

**“We have a responsibility to try to shape government so that it does exemplify the will of God.”**

It will be a sad day when the link between God and our national life is forgotten and put asunder.

We should therefore hear the Word of God even as we pray and work for a more just society, a better America, an America that is a beacon of hope and freedom.

But let me hasten to say that we mustn't draw the circle too small. We mustn't adopt an unhealthy particularism in relation to the USA. After all, the Kingdom of God is not conterminous with America. It is much bigger, as one of our hymns suggests:

And not to us alone,  
But be thy mercies known  
From shore to shore.  
Lord make the nations see  
That men should brothers be  
And form one family  
The wide world o'er. (Hymn 146)

So far, I have focused solely on the opening words of today's Gospel: **“The people pressed upon him to hear the word of God.”**

But, of course, there is much more to be unpacked. Before I close, allow me to point you to another line which augments what we have already seen about hearing the Word of God.

It comes after Jesus had finished preaching. At this point, He looks with compassion on Peter and his companions who had toiled all night and had caught nothing.



Perhaps you know how they felt. You've been there.

In any case, Jesus, at this point, gives Peter some unsought advice. He tells him to take the boat out a bit and let down his net in the deeper water.

What Jesus was telling him to do went against everything Peter knew as a seasoned fisherman, yet his response is instructive: **“Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”**

It is not enough merely to hear the word of God; it must be obeyed. Hearing must be followed by obedience.

There will be times when we won't understand what God is prompting us to do. Yet, we must say with Peter, **“Nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net.”**

Obedience brings blessings untold. For Peter it was a call to a new vocation . . . to become a fisher of men.

What it will mean to each one of us is hard to say. Even so, God's way is best.

It may not be the way of ease. Peter's call, after all, led him to a cross. He was crucified, tradition tells us, head down. Yet, in the end, Peter discovered in the midst of suffering that peace which passes all understanding. That must be our aim as well. ///

You might want to take a moment this morning to ask yourself:

What is the still small voice within calling me to do?"

Maybe it is:

--To lay aside some cherished sin.

--To forgive someone.

-- To be a better husband or wife.

--To take on a task that is outside my 'comfort zone'.

--Or, to wait for more instructions, NOT to plunge ahead with some plan of my own without seeking direction from above. **“In all thy ways acknowledge him, And he shall direct thy paths,”** says Proverbs 3:6.

Whatever it is, let hearing the word of God be followed by obedience. ///

In closing. “Tell me the stories of Jesus.”

Tell them . . .

Not so that I may be merely entertained by them.

Not so that I can debate them.

Not so that I can impress others with my Bible knowledge.

But so that I can be changed by them.

May it be so with the ‘tale by the sea’ at which we have looked this morning. From it, may we learn the importance of both hearing and obeying the Word of God.