

Year C, February 10, 2019
5 Epiphany
Christ Church, Mexia

Because the gospel this morning mentions fishing, I'd like to begin by sharing a story about a renowned Episcopal Bishop, Phillips Brooks, who was the Bishop of Massachusetts for a brief time in the early 1890s. According to the story:

An old boatman who rowed a skiff for Phillips Brooks when the beloved churchman went in quest of the denizens of the deep, was performing a similar service for another clerical angler who recalled what a noble soul the bishop was.

'Right ye are,' the oarsman agreed, 'cept his swearing.' 'Bishop Brooks swear? Impossible!' the preacher fisherman exclaimed. 'Oh, but he did, leastwise he swore onct. He hooked a beautiful bass and got the wriggling fellow up to the boat, an' just as I went to get him with the hand-net, he flopped clean off the hook. That's too damned bad, Bishop! I said. And he said, 'Yes, it is.' But that's the only time I ever heard him use such language.

If you've ever watched the programs on the Discovery Channel or others about modern day fishing, you know fishing isn't an easy task or life. And if it is so difficult with all the technology today, such as GPS, sonar, electric winches, etc., imagine how hard it must have been in the 1st century. Going out in a small boat with maybe a sail, throwing and retrieving nets by hand, and nothing to guide you to where the fish might be except for what had been learned and passed down by those who had gone before.

So, Jesus borrows Simon's (Peter's) boat so he can get a better place from which to teach the crowds who have gathered by the shore. Then he says let's go out to deep water and catch some fish. But they've already fished all night and caught nothing. They're tired, and some land lubber thinks he knows where the fish are! But they do it, and Viola! – they catch so many fish they have to ask another boat to come help them. And, if that weren't enough, there were so many fish both boats are in danger of sinking. Now that's some fish story! But it convinced Simon, James and John to leave everything and follow Jesus. Why?

Possibly because they saw the power of God in Jesus Christ. The power that came to Jesus from God to do things that are not humanly possible. And I am reminded every time I go to our refrigerator of the words from Paul's letter to the Philippians (4:13), "I can do all things through Christ," because Janet placed a magnet there with that verse on it. Can **I** locate schools of fish, heal the blind or lame, turn water into wine...? Probably not when, like Peter, I feel sinful and unworthy. Or when I lack faith. But I am reminded by George Muller that "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends." And I need to hear those words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid," as they were heard in that boat so long ago and try to do what God gives me the power to do through faith. Just trust in God – the message that Peter and the others witnessed.

As Rev. J. Barrington Bates observes:

This insight does not assure us success; it reminds us of our salvation. ... This power does not scare us into submission; it invites us, gently and lovingly, to give up our fears and trust in God.

This power comes from God – by our very life, through our baptism, and again and again in our simple ritual meal (here at the altar). This power comes to us every day, in ways we have not yet begun to understand or imagine. This power comes to us in our joy and in our pain, when we struggle and when we succeed. This power allows us to become more and more what God created us to be. (And) This power is love.

Love like we heard about last week; love, the only power that can turn an enemy into a friend.

As our Presiding Bishop, Michael, reminded us in his sermon at the Royal wedding last year: "The New Testament says it this way: 'Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; and those who love are born of God and know God. Those who do not love do not know God. Why? Because God is love.'" (so it is written in 1 John 4:7-8).

There's power in love. There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can. There's power in love to lift up and liberate when

nothing else will. There's power in love to show us the way to live." I have been fortunate enough to have experienced this power, and it saved my life. I hope and pray that you have known it as well.

Because with love, we can trust that God will provide what we truly need – probably not all that we want, but what we need. With love we can heal the suffering that exists in our world today. So much to do there sadly. And, with love, we can truly mean and live by what we said while renewing our Baptismal Vows when Bishop Fisher was here, "I will, with God's help."

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In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.