

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C 2006 - Luke 5:1-11

1. In the years since September 11<sup>th</sup> and the start of the “war on Terror”
  - a. news of hostages and homicide have become so common that they barely make us flinch.
2. And yet we were horrified last October
  - a. when we heard reports about a man named Charles Roberts,
  - b. who killed himself after murdering several girls
    - i. in a school in central Pennsylvania.
3. News reporters covered this event for days;
  - a. Not just because the deaths took place here in this country.
  - b. Nor because they were school children.
  - c. But because the children were Amish children, members of a religious sect that lives as if it were still the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
4. Many news commentators spoke of how the horror of the modern world
  - a. had entered into their simple lives.
5. Many others spoke of how their old - fashioned ways
  - a. were poor protection against these horrors.
6. Some spoke however, about another dimension of the tragedy;
  - a. The religious dimension;
    - i. Asking how the old - fashioned Amish,
      - (1) who believe that God calls them to live their simple life,
        - (a) would deal with this modern horror?
7. It was fascinating to see how some reporters watched the Amish go through their mourning rituals-
  - a. hoping to find in them some ancient insight
    - i. into how to bring faith in God together with such senseless tragedy.
  - b. Many believed they found their answer to that question in one of the first acts the Amish did following the burial of their children.
    - i. They tore the school house to the ground, and carried its pieces away.
8. Some judged the Amish for this; seeing it as denial.
  - a. And saying that it was logical that they dealt with these deaths in that way;
  - b. Because denial is how they deal with everything;
    - i. that is why they live the way they do
      - (1) and believe the way they do.
9. And yet denial is hardly old fashioned.
  - a. For denial is the way most of us deal with the horrors of modern life;
  - b. Oh yes, thousands die on 9/11 and we fight for years about it
  - c. Children are massacred in other schools such as Columbine
    - i. and there are yearly commemorations of it
  - d. Our modern world sees to it that we revisit and reopen those wounds regularly,
    - i. so that our anger remains raw and no one ever forgets.
    - ii. And yet children suffer from hunger and exploitation
    - iii. Thousands die from curable diseases
    - iv. People are massacred in Baghdad every day,
      - (1) and we hardly notice.
10. And that is because we have decided that there is no way

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- a. to bring faith in God together with the horrors of the modern world.
11. That the only way to deal with these tragedies
  - a. is either to focus on our anger
  - b. or to ignore them;
    - i. and both are simply different forms of denial.
12. You don't have to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nor pretend that it is the 19<sup>th</sup> century to understand this- Peter certainly did, all the way back in the first century.
  - a. For when Jesus, after commandeering Peter's boat as a pulpit,
  - b. asks Peter to put out in deep water and cast his nets to catch fish.
13. Peter at first resists.
  - a. After all, he had just returned empty-handed from spending all night out there.
  - b. And while he might not know as much about God as Jesus seemed to,
    - i. he did know that the one place you were not going to find God  
(1) was at the bottom of a fishing net.
14. And yet what makes Peter so different from us is that after he resists he relents;
  - a. and catches so much fish that the boat nearly sinks.
15. Peter's reaction is predictable -
  - a. he falls on his knees, and confesses his unworthiness -
  - b. after all he had denied Jesus -
    - i. something which we know he would one day do again.
16. However Jesus would not allow him to wallow in his self pity, nor hide behind his fear;
  - a. for those too can be forms of self denial;
17. In short Jesus had chosen him, chosen all of them there to do
  - a. what they had thought impossible; find God at the bottom of a fishing net
  - b. only now they would be using their natural talents as fishermen
    - i. for supernatural purposes; for now they would be "catching men"
  - c. bringing people together so that they might challenge one another to do what so many of us find impossible
    - i. to find God in the midst of the horrors of this world.
18. That is so difficult for so many of us that like Peter we resist trying.
  - a. We hide behind our supposed unworthiness;
    - i. saying things like I can't go to church - the roof will fall in!
  - b. We hide behind our fear,
    - i. refusing to allow beliefs that have not changed since childhood to be challenged by adult realities
  - c. We wallow in our anger, our pain in anything so that we can avoid the anger and pain of others.
  - d. We live in denial, and thus we expect others to do the same.
19. Which is perhaps why the cameras left the Amish almost as quickly as they came.
  - a. And in doing so missed something.
20. They missed how instead of wallowing in their pain and anger,
  - a. the Amish who never reach out to outsiders,
    - i. reached out - to the family of Charles Roberts.
      - (1) How they gave gifts to his children,
      - (2) collected money for their education;

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- (3) erected a Christmas tree for them
  - (4) and even now still attend his children's sports games.
- 21. Why do these things?
  - a. Simply because this was the only way they could find God in the midst of the horrors of this world - they forgave.
- 22. It is little wonder that most news commentators missed this -
  - a. they would have never understood it
- 23. because forgiveness in such a situation is absolutely incomprehensible to us.
  - a. But that is because we think that forgiveness should be easy;
    - i. a simple change of mind and heart;
      - (1) "forgive and forget" as if the two are linked,
        - (a) and since we cannot forget we will never forgive.
- 24. But the Amish are willing to face what we are in denial of;
  - a. that forgiveness is never easy;
    - i. It isn't a simple change of a mind and heart
      - (1) but the difficult work of mending lives and relationships.
  - b. Forgiveness is not a way to forget the wrong;
  - c. Forgiveness is precisely the way to remember it;
    - i. by allowing the wrong done to heal and form a scar -
      - (1) an eternal reminder of what happened;
      - (2) But also the eternal reminder that we have moved beyond it
        - (a) and are free to begin again.
    - ii. Which why the Amish have already constructed a new school house for their children and classes will begin again there in the fall.
- 25. Perhaps the Amish aren't so backward after all; for in their old fashioned lives they have preserved something that we could desperately use in our modern world;
  - a. The difficult practice of forgiveness.
    - i. Which for them and for us might be the best way to follow in the footsteps off that first person to be forgiven by Jesus - Peter, and bring people together so that through their experience of forgiveness they might do what so many of us find impossible.
      - (1) find God in the midst of the horrors of this world.
      - (2) And help others find God too;
    - ii. Maybe that is what being fishers of men meant for Jesus;
    - iii. Imagine what our world would look like if it meant that for us?
      - (1) It still can. All we have to do is stop the denial;
        - (a) and begin the difficult work of forgiveness.