

Sermons at Saint Mark's

The Rev. Earl Grout

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Feb 7, 2010

Isaiah 6:1-13; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

As one who serves

Lake Gennesaret—8 x 13 miles of it— sits in a hallow of the earth, 680 feet below sea level. From that gently rocking boat with the sun on his back, Jesus would have been teaching some of the 15,000 people who lived in the 9 towns around the lake. It is in details like these that the vividness, the excitement of our incarnational faith comes alive for me. In Jesus, God walked, talked, even fished—lived among us as they put out into the deep water with some pitch and roll and the wind in their faces.

Peter growls about it, since the timing is wrong. Night is the best time to fish, and last night was zilch-point-zero. But Lake Gennesaret had phenomenal shoals that covered as much as an acre. Jesus probably spotted one. So what does this story mean for us? Our faith may be vividly incarnational, but it is still faith, a journey toward God.

The earth is full of miracles for the eye that sees. Jesus saw more than a shoal of fish. For one thing, he knew that the days were coming soon when the synagogues would be closed to him, and his church would be the lakeside and the open road. "I love a commodious room," said John Wesley, "a soft cushion and a handsome pulpit, but field preaching saves souls." And "from now on you will be catching people," Jesus told Peter, and mighty indeed will be the catch. He saw that.

And he saw too the Kingdom of God breaking into the world, the rule of justice and peace

where the poor, the sick, all the outcast and downcast are brought into the center of life and all things are made new. In the very next story, Jesus touches and heals a leper, restoring him to physical, social and spiritual health. In Jesus, God's compassionate love extends healing and wholeness to the world's farthest fringes. If our eyes really see, we will see more here than a healing miracle and more in today's Gospel story than a fishing miracle; we will see the miracle and meaning of the Kingdom of God itself.

Jesus left us the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we too may bring the healing power of God's Kingdom into our own time. Like Wesley, we too may love our commodious room even without soft cushions and also our handsome pulpit—well, our crows nest. But our church too is the field—maybe not for us the lake or open road, but certainly the streets outside our door. Strengthened in the Spirit, we are called to be harbingers of the Kingdom, bringing the healing light of its compassion to the farthest fringes of our world. Today, right here, right now at Saint Mark's, we have a unique opportunity to do just that.

Many of you have heard about Nick Canaday House. In the early fall, Nick Canaday House will open on First Hill, offering 83 apartments with full kitchen and bath to chronically homeless men and women, who suffer severe and persistent mental illness. 25 of the units will go to disabled veterans.

Many of you knew Nick. Nick and his wife Amelia spent many of their working years in Louisiana, where Nick taught American Literature at LSU. In retirement they moved to Seattle, where both became active members of Saint Mark's and dedicated themselves to serving the homeless. Nick devoted countless hours of service to the Downtown Emergency Service Center, which focuses on the homelessness of the most vulnerable members of our community—those suffering serious mental or addictive illnesses. Nick Canaday House will be the 11th of DESC's special facilities that offer housing and counseling.

Nick Canaday passed away in 2003, but his compassion for the homeless lives on in Saint Mark's close relationships to the King County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness and the Interfaith Taskforce on Homelessness. Nick's dedication to the most troubled among the homeless makes it fitting that this new place be known as Nick Canaday House. His love for Saint Mark's and its enduring outreach to the homeless make it fitting that we help make Canaday House a welcoming place to those whom Jesus welcomed at his table.

Saint Mark's has committed, in Nick's honor, to furnish all 83 studio apartments with basic household supplies: bedding, kitchen equipment, bathroom supplies and cleaning items. From saucepans to shower curtains, blankets to brooms. You get the idea.

Next Sunday—February 14—Canaday House will be introduced formally at a special Sunday forum. You will learn about the building, the apartments, what is needed and how you can be involved. For now, I can tell you that a recon team of Saint Mark's shopping mavens figured out that one apartment can be outfitted for \$250, more or less, depending on where you go.

So what do we do? First of all, have fun! Form teams. Get a couple of people you know, or better yet, whom you don't know in the parish. Or do it as a family, or grab your neighbors or a couple of people from work. If you're not able to do the Mall Assault—you know, go shopping—you could fund one of the teams, or form one of your own and fund it. Each team can adopt an apartment and design its look. On move-in day, the teams will bring their stuff and outfit their apartment. Now that will be a party!

There is a wonderful energy here at Saint Mark's. Let's capitalize on that. Nick Canaday House offers huge collateral benefits to our parish. By forming teams within the parish, we can get to know each other better, especially if we team up with people we don't know. By reaching outside the parish, we let our neighbors and co-workers know who we are and how we live our faith. Good outreach is always good evangelism. People want to belong to churches where exciting things are happening. And they are at Saint Mark's.

Peter glimpsed Jesus' divinity in the massive haul of fish. He said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." But Peter was to experience grace as he was accepted and later forgiven by Jesus in spite of denying him. We too experience grace as we come here week by week, undeserving yet worthy, to receive God in the Eucharist. Grace is why Nick Canaday poured out his love to the homeless. Grace is why we will go to his house on opening day, and make 83 apartments look like home for someone whose home is a backpack.

We don't do these things to earn God's love, but in thanksgiving that we already have it. We buy dishes and dustpans for Nick's house, because in Jesus we have received the means of grace and the hope of glory, because in him God's love burns in our hearts and lights the

lamp of our faith to the world. We do it for joy.

If we ever wonder what dent 83 small apartments will make in so great a need, we can remember Mother Theresa's response to just such a question. "We are not called to be successful," she said. "we are called to be faithful."

A holy rabbi disappeared each week on the eve of the Sabbath. The congregation suspected that he was secretly meeting with God, so they selected a member to follow him. The spy watched as the rabbi changed into work clothes, and walked to the cottage of aged Gentile woman. He cleaned her home, did her chores, and prepared a Sabbath meal for her. When the spy came back, the congregation eagerly asked, "Where did the rabbi go? Did he ascend into heaven?"

"No," the spy replied. "He went even higher."

We too can go higher. Every act of kindness, no matter how small, puts a pin hole in the fabric of this life and allows the light of God's Kingdom to shine through. When that new resident walks into the apartment your team furnished and looks around, taking in the meaning of home for the first time in a long time, if ever, the light that surrounds that man or woman will be holy. "I come among you as one who serves," Jesus told his disciples. We can't go any higher than that. Let's go there together in memory of Nick Canaday and for the glory of God. Amen.