

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon peached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after The Epiphany
February 10, 2019

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19th Century English painter Edwin Long made a visit to Egypt and Syria. He also went to the Sea of Galilee because he wanted to paint a picture of today's gospel incident of Jesus preaching from a boat. Painters look around for the right spot. On the Capernaum shore Long found the perfect setting. He described it in his diary. It was a small semi-circular bay with a quick drop off into deep water so that a large boat would have water under its keel almost right up to the shore. Because the bay was small, an audience on shore could easily hear a speaker in a boat pushed off from shore. As you know, still water makes a great sounding board. That fact is the bane of boaters wanting a quiet night's sleep while docked in a marina! Edwin Long imagined it was in just such a place, *perhaps this very place*, where the Lord Jesus gave His first boat sermon. The painting is set just before sunset and the title tells us the Lord is teaching the Parable of the Sower. It's a large canvass and was also Edwin Long's *last* painting, from around 1890.

The Lord had come to issue His final call to the four fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They had been with the Lord for some time and He sent them back to work in order to think things over. When they arrived at the shore it would have been more convenient for the Lord's purpose if no one else were present. But there was a crowd. And a crowd meant the opportunity for teaching. So Jesus taught. That is the scene Edwin Long depicted.

As with last week's description of the synagogue service at Nazareth, we do not have the boat sermon Christ preached. This does not mean the disciples ignored Christ's sermons! And the evangelists would have certainly been interested. *All* Christians down to our own day would hang on every word. But the absence of the actual sermons serves as a reminder the gospel is not primarily the good news of what Christ taught but *Who He is and what He did* for our redemption.

As with the incident at Nazareth, something happened *after* the sermon from the boat. Quite unexpectedly the carpenter from Nazareth took command of the very work the fishermen were giving up in order to follow Jesus! Peter must have been amused. *He* was the fisherman. So Peter respectfully tried to explain that the fish weren't biting right now. But the Master insisted. Following Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is not boxed in as a "spiritual" thing or a "Sunday" thing. Jesus was

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demanding an act of faith involving the very life work of Simon and the other fishermen. Jesus will be Lord of all your life or none of it.

When the record catch of fish was brought to shore there was much laughter at the expense of the young fishermen. “The carpenter knows more about fishing than you guys!” And then after an impromptu fish market, the people may have thought about a *variety* of explanations as they walked away with their evening meal. But for one man there was no variety of explanations.

During the hubbub the usually boisterous Simon Peter was unusually quiet and still. For Peter there was only one explanation. Jesus had been able to look right into the depth of the lake. Wouldn't you love to hear St Peter's sermons about it? He'd get to this part and say about the Lord “Just as He saw the fish, *He could read my life.*” And surprising himself and his fishing partners, Simon Peter found himself falling at Jesus' knees and saying “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

This wasn't the Simon everyone else knew, the Simon who could bluff and bluster and round off the corners of the truth with fishermen's stories. The relationship with Christ was different. At first Peter and the others probably thought following Jesus meant living ordinary lives and checking in with the Master on occasion. But the more they were with Jesus the more they realized it was to be life in an entirely new order, one in which they were not merely to learn from Jesus but actually do the things He did.

Jesus knew Simon Peter was a sinner and a failure and all that. *But the Lord knew more.* Here is one of the great moments in the Bible! Just when Simon Peter couldn't bear the thought of it all, I see Blessed Jesus smiling, confident, and gentle as He says, “Do not be afraid Simon; henceforth you will be catching men.” And it will be as the Lord says.