

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity  
Luke 5:1-11

Reverence is something important for the Christian and Peter shows us today why we care about it.

Peter and the other fishermen are seasoned veterans. They know fishing. Peter objects to Jesus' command to go into the deep water and cast his nets: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" (v. 5) He obviously doesn't think it's a good idea to go back out to a well fished area in the middle of the day. Yet, he obeys: "But at Your word I will let down the nets." (v. 5) Peter obviously respects Jesus as an important teacher. He lets Jesus use his boat to teach from because the crowd was so pushy. Teachers of the Law of God were well respected. The crowd's reaction to Jesus shows us that He was a popular Teacher, at least in the beginning. When Peter sees the incredible catch of fish, he has a curious reaction: "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'" The overwhelming catch of fish obviously unnatural. It was a miracle. Peter and the other seasoned fishermen catch a glimpse of the glory of God in Jesus. And Peter's reaction matches the children of Israel, Isaiah, and John when they see the glory of God.

The children of Israel see the glory of God on the mountain when Moses comes down with the Ten Commandments. Moses recounts their reaction:

*24 And you said, 'Behold, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire. This day we have seen God speak with man, and man still live. 25 Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived? 27 Go near and hear all that the Lord our God will say, and*

*Speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it.'*

28 *"And the Lord heard your words, when you spoke to me. And the Lord said to me, 'I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.' (Deuteronomy 5:24–28)*

God said that the children of Israel were right in all that they have spoken. God is a great fire who consumes all wickedness.

Isaiah sees the glory of the Lord upon His throne and this is his reaction:

*"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5)*

God is Holy! He cannot abide with wickedness!

Lest you think this is just an Old Testament theme, the same thing happened to John in his Revelation. Jesus brought him to His throne room and ordered John to write a book to the seven churches. John who was the beloved disciple and laid upon Jesus' bosom, had this reaction:

12 *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

17 *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Revelation 1:12–17)*

Jesus, our God, is terrifyingly holy and He does not abide with wickedness... even from those whom He loves.

Reverence, that is, a holy fear of God, is something the Christian wrestles with. And the place where we wrestle with it most is in the Divine Service. The miracle of the Lord's Supper, where He turns bread and wine into His very own Body and Blood, is a much bigger miracle than the miraculous catch of fish. It brings the glory of God to us in a way unlike any other way. To our mortal eyes it looks like a simple meal of meagre bread and cheap wine. But to the eyes of faith, it looks like a kingly feast, or marriage banquet, where heaven and earth come together. We partake of heavenly food in the midst of a sin-plagued world. If that's not worthy of reverence, then I don't know what is.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, reverence is "deep respect or veneration, especially on account of the object's sacred or exalted character." Just as personally as God was with Moses on the mountain, and with Isaiah and John in His throne room, and with Peter in his fishing boat, He is here with us today in person. He masks Himself behind bread and wine so that we "poor sinful beings" might not be consumed by His holy fire.

This is why we are to act with reverence in the Divine Service. The author of Hebrews encourages us this way:

*"Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29)*

Our confessions say the same thing: "Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. The Mass is held among us and celebrated with the highest reverence." (AC XXIV.1) Mass here means nothing other than the Divine Service. So we would say it this way today:

“Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Divine Service. The Divine Service is held among us and celebrated with the highest reverence.” Oh, that I wish it were so!

This is something that we can work on to get better. I wonder if a stranger coming into our church and observing our service from pre-service to post-service, would think we are reverent? You’ve heard it many times from me; if a stranger looks at our service, I want them to think two things: first, what’s going on in here is not like the world around me, and second, the people in the pews think what’s going on is important. Reverence is one way we show that we believe we are being visited in person by the living, risen Christ!

I know some of you might be irritated with me. “Pastor, I’m just not a reverent person! That’s not me!” Or something like, “Here we go again... pastor’s on his sacred soap box.” Or something else like, “well, that’s just pastor’s opinion.” Trust me, I wish it was just my opinion or a matter of opinion. I embody my generation’s attitude of irreverence better than most, but I hope the Bible passages and confession citation I quoted persuades you that this is actually an important matter. As King Solomon teaches us,

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” (Prov. 9:10)*

Fear here means fear. Fear and reverence go hand in hand. The gestures of reverence include quiet contemplation and prayer before the service, the sign of the cross, bowing, genuflecting, and kneeling. These not only serve well to remind you that you are in the presence of the holy God, but it works well to pass on the attitude of reverence to your kids.

Some of you may find such things pretentious. Pretentious means “attempting to impress by affecting greater importance, talent, or culture than is actually possessed.” (Oxford Languages) I understand that it may appear to be that way.

But the attitude of reverence is not confessing that you're important but the one you're worshiping is important and, in fact, is greater than anything else.

But there are a couple of dangers in the practice of reverence. The first one that we fall into is the danger of merit hunting. We think that the physical acts of reverence gain merit before God or before men. Before God, we turn acts of reverence into brownie points with God. The confessions rail against this practice in the Roman Catholic church and we easily fall into the same trap. There's really nothing new under the sun! Nothing we do gains merit with God and if we insist on that, we will burn eternally with our so-called merits. We depend on the merits of Christ. And we receive His merits through faith alone. Before men, we turn acts of reverence into either pretentiousness or judgment. We act as if we are better Christians because we act "reverently" or we judge others on what we perceive as a lack of reverence, even though we know we can't see their heart. Either way, if we do this, we fall into the trap of sinning grievously against God and our neighbor.

The second danger is the same danger we have with the Lord's Prayer. It's a huge temptation to pray or do the practices of reverence by rote, or without thought. Think of when you brush your teeth. You do this at least twice each day, and you think of a hundred different things while you're brushing your teeth. However, how's your attention when you're doing something dangerous like driving during rush hour? It has your full attention, doesn't it? As moms warn their boys, if you play with fire, you can get hurt. Our God is a consuming fire and is dangerous.

Now reverence can certainly be abused, but the abuse of reverence doesn't mean that reverence should be thrown out. We show reverence because we are in the physical, personal presence of our amazing, living, holy, awesome Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And thanks be to God, He loves us just as He loved the children of Israel, Isaiah, Peter, and John.

God didn't consume the children of Israel and gave them His Word safely through His servant Moses. God gives you His Word through pastors, parents, and the mutual consolation of your brothers and sisters in Christ. God takes away Isaiah's guilt and atones for his sin with a burning coal touched to his lips. Jesus takes away your guilt and forgives your sin by dying for you on the cross and washing you clean in the waters of baptism. Jesus tells Peter and John not to fear because He is for them and not against them. With baptism, absolution, preaching, and the Lord's Supper, Jesus assures you that you have nothing to fear. God does not hold your sin against you. You are free from guilt and shame.

And He makes you all fishers of men. God doesn't remove you from the world but leaves you in the world to make it a better place. And we make it a better world by sharing the Word of God and our lives with our neighbor. And in the world, there is plenty of time for irreverence. There is time for laughter and for joy; time for tears and sorrow. Time for work and time for fun. Time for seriousness and time for silliness. Time for feasting and a time for fasting. This is a God pleasing thing. But showing reverence in the Divine Service is also God pleasing as well.

And this doesn't mean that I expect you to show reverence just like me or all in the same way. Most of us kneel for the Lord's Supper out of reverence for the gift of our Lord's Body and Blood. But there may come a time when you can't kneel and that can be reverent as well. In many churches, you see everyone kneel like Pastor Holm and I do during the confession and absolution, but we don't have kneelers and that doesn't mean *de facto* that we're irreverent.

I do want you to think about what happens in the Divine Service. Contemplate how the living, risen Christ visits you in person and blesses you personally. This contemplation is worth your time and our Lord will bless you richly.

In Jesus' name. Amen.