

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany**

Sunday, 10 February 2019

“A Christian Life: A Constant Venture”

Annual Congregational Budget Finance Meeting

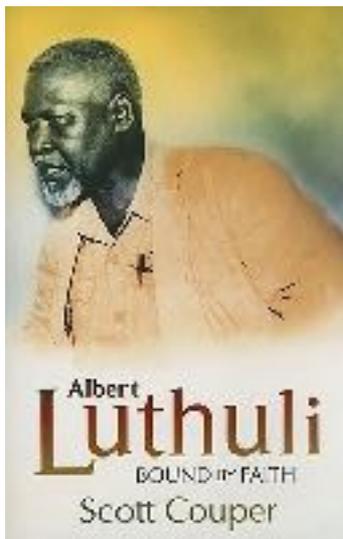
Christian Scripture: Luke 5:1-11



Albert Luthuli, whose biography I wrote, preached a sermon on the 9th of November 1952 at Adams College in South Africa entitled “A Christian Life: A Constant Venture”. I entitled this morning’s message the same.



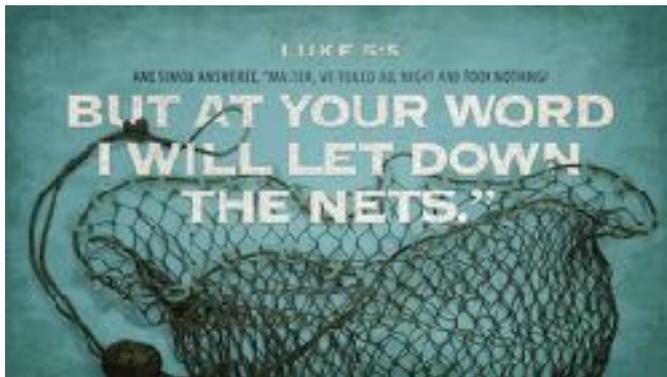
Luthuli preached on the same scripture we heard Peter read so beautifully, the story of the disciples fishing and Peter putting the boat “out into the deep water” (Luke 5:4).



In Luthuli’s 1952 sermon, he highlighted that the disciples worked all night and had not caught any fish. I’m not sure what the disciples did all night while being bored not catching fish. Maybe they told jokes. Who knows? I can see Peter asking Philip, “Philip, what songs shall we sing while fishing?” Philip responded, “I don’t know. What

songs should we sing?” Peter: “May I suggest something ‘catchy’?”

Maybe they told scriptural jokes such as “Why didn’t Noah do much fishing much on the ark? Well, he had only two worms.” Despite complaining that nothing had been caught all night, Jesus responded to the disciples to drop their nets again.



Peter exclaimed in exasperation that the additional effort would most likely be a complete waste of time, but “If you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5).

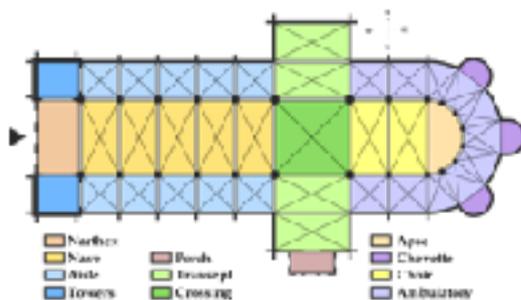


How many of you have ever heard the phrase, ‘Been there; done that’? That was what Peter said when Jesus asked him to cast his net again. Peter said, ‘We have been there; done that, and we have nothing to show for it. But because, you, Jesus, are asking, we will

continue to do what we believe has been thus far futile'. The nets were cast again and the results were radically different.



Friends, if we look at the front of our financial report it states that we are this afternoon holding our 203rd Annual Congregational Financial Budget meeting. 203rd! Incredible. While I can't say, "Been there; done that", as this is my first finance meeting, many of you can say you have been here before, that you have done this before. Although, as far as I can tell, none of you 203 times.



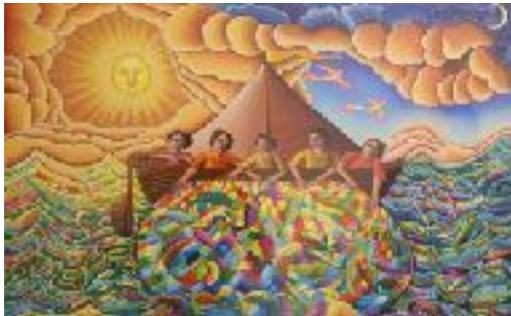
Most of you, like the disciples, have been working, as the scriptures state, “hard all night” on this boat we can call the U.S.S. “Centre Congregational Church”. Many of you like Saint Peter and the other disciples are likely tired, some burnt out, and perhaps think that your efforts are futile. Over the years, not only have we not added numbers to our net, we have lost those that we had, like our beloved Dot Atomonuk. Yet, as we lost one, whose spirit will always be with us, we will next week welcome into our fellowship Jeanuska, Shiva, Gina, Bonnie, and Olivia. So, we have much reason to be positive, not resigned.



In our scripture, the boat from which Jesus peached to the people was anchored “a little from shore” (5:3), that is, in shallow water. Jesus asked Peter to cast his net in the water only after putting “out into deep water” (5:4). In the ancient mind, and still often in the minds of moderns, the sea is an abyss, a place of darkness and chaos.

The primordial creatures of evil and death lurked within its depths.

The deep sea was something to be feared, dreaded.



So, Jesus' injunction for Peter and the disciples "to put into deep water" was not only a call to continue to do that which was previously done to no avail, it was a call do so with much danger and vulnerability. What Jesus requested the disciples to do required them to overcome their doubts about both utility and failure through faith and obedience.



As we consider the finances of our church, we consider the future of our church. If we consider the church a boat, the design and engineering of the boat is from God, our Creator. You, my brothers and sisters, are the engine of our church. Our love for God and one

another is the fuel for our church. And finances are *the drivetrain* for our church. Finances are that which convert the love of God, through us the engine, into the force that drives the propellers and the boat forward into deep water.

Friends, at this finance meeting we will be putting out into the deep. We are a church in a secular culture and in a secular state. We are few in number. Our finances are tight. Our boat may even be leaking (I'm talking about the endowment). Yet, we are called by Jesus Christ to continue to cast our net into the deep water though we are tired and may see our efforts as futile.



Indeed one can say our nets are already bursting, the number of children at the Brattleboro Centre for Children is increasing. The number of homeless coming to Loaves and Fishes to eat is increasing. Our church membership after next week will be increasing. Perhaps after hearing from Jenifer and Roger about the Vermont Conference's

‘Vitality’ workshop they attended yesterday in Springfield, we will learn about more ‘nets’ that we can cast into the water.

As we open our Annual Congregational Budget Finance meeting immediately following this service, let us consider putting our boat out into the deep and let us continue to do that which we have always done for two-hundred and three years to varying degrees of success, casting out our nets - in obedience to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

This was the word of God. And it was preached to the people of God. And the people of God responded, “Amen”!