

Jesus Calls Fishermen to be Fishers of Men

I. With a Display of Power

II. With a Word of Grace

¹One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,² the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Just for a minute, I want you to imagine that you are about to undergo open-heart surgery. Understandably, you're feeling a little anxious about it, so you ask the doctor who's going to do the surgery, "So, Doc, can you tell me, how many of these surgeries have you done before?" He responds, "Actually, you have the honor of being my very person I've ever performed this surgery on." That's not exactly what you wanted to hear, is it? You're looking for someone with a whole lot more experience, someone who is truly qualified for the job.

Well, if that's true for someone who is about to perform physical heart surgery, isn't it even more important for someone who is playing a role and what we might call spiritual heart surgery? The Bible says that *God our Savior wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4)*. In our epistle lesson, we heard St. Paul ask the question, "But how can anyone believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear unless someone is sent?" Which means that in God's eyes, one of the most critical jobs that any human being can ever be asked to do, a job that may determine whether a fellow human being lives or dies eternally, is the job of sharing the good news, that is, telling people what God has done for them in their Savior Jesus Christ.

And because that task is so critical, because the eternal destiny of millions of people is dependent on that job being carried out effectively, one would think that God would leave that job to the experts, you know, some holy beings who cannot sin, and therefore, can't mess up the mission—I'm talking about the angels. But God doesn't do that. Even though, on occasion, God sent angels to proclaim the good news, the fact is, today God sends out people who appear to be

far less qualified, people who are flawed; people who mess up. I'm talking about people like you and me. When God called us to faith in Jesus Christ, he also called us to be his disciples, his ambassadors, yes, his fishers of men.

But you realize, we're not the first people called to these positions. Our text for today records how Jesus did the same thing for another group of seemingly unqualified people. In this case, it was a bunch of unschooled fisherman. Now, please understand, I'm not against fisherman. I happen to be one. But in this case these guys knew more about cleaning tilapia than they knew about sharing the gospel. But that's what makes this account so amazing, and so applicable for our lives today. Our theme for today is simply this:

Jesus Calls Fishermen to be Fishers of Men.

He does that first, (I.) With a display of his power. But more importantly, he does that (II.) With a word of his grace.

The account that we have from Luke's Gospel takes place relatively early in Jesus' ministry. People like Peter and Andrew, James and John, had already come into contact with Jesus. But they had not yet become full-time disciples of this rabbi from Nazareth. But all that is about to change. After using Simon Peter's boat as a makeshift pulpit to allow more people to see and hear him, Jesus gives these instructions to Peter, *"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."*

Now maybe to you and me, 21st century Americans, this sounds like a reasonable request. "Peter, why don't you go out fishing?" But to a professional fisherman like Peter, who knew that the best fishing was at night, when the fish couldn't see the net, and in the shallow water where the net could extend from the top of the water to the bottom, this idea of dropping a net in the middle of the lake, in the middle of the day—well, that would make no sense at all. I mean, don't you think there might be a little voice in Peter's head saying, "What does this son of a carpenter know about fishing? He doesn't know what he's talking about. This is a dumb idea."

Now granted, in the end, Peter obliges his master. He does what Jesus commands. But you get the sense that Peter is not completely sold on Jesus' plan. Peter says to Jesus, *"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

Tell me, can you relate? Have you ever found yourself kind of questioning God's plan? You know, "God, why would you want me to do this? Why should I believe that? This doesn't make sense to me." We may feel like Peter, doing what Jesus said to do, but not really believing that it's going to do any good. But in Peter's case, when he let down the net, what happened? The totally unexpected! They caught so many fish that the net started to break. Peter has to call in reinforcements. And they end up with so many fish that they almost sink two boats.

Again, can you relate? Have you ever been in a situation where you had some misgivings about God's plan, but in the end, God blessed you in ways that you could never imagine? Maybe it involvement job change, or a relocation, or a challenging relationship, and you're thinking, "God, how is this going to work out?" But you put the matter in God's hands and he blesses you in ways you never expected. Or maybe you've got this friend who is really down on organized religion, she's really skeptical about the claims of Scripture, but you keep loving her and showing her grace and you find ways to tell her about Jesus, his love, his forgiveness, and in the end, she responds in a way you never expected. She thanks you for telling her the truth. And you're thinking, "God, you really are amazing. Once again, you've done more than I could ever imagine."

My friends, don't you think that was the impact that the miracle on the Sea of Galilee

would have had on Peter and his fellow fisherman? It was proof to them that at Jesus' words, miracles happen. With this miraculous display of power, Jesus was inviting his disciples to put their trust in him to meet all their needs, both physical and spiritual. With this miracle, God was foreshadowing the miracle of Pentecost, when at Jesus' word, it wouldn't be fish that were gathered in; it would be souls—3000 in one day. All of this was proof that Jesus was in control. With his word, Jesus could work miracles.

But did you notice, here in our text, when Jesus performs this amazing miracle, it doesn't lead Peter to say, "Wow, Jesus, thank you so much for all those fish." He doesn't say, "Jesus, we ought to go into the fishing business together. We could make a lot of money." He doesn't even say, "Lord, from now on, I'm putting all my trust in you." No, what did Peter say? Luke records it. *When Simon Peter saw this (namely, when he saw this miraculous catch of fish), he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man."*

Why would Peter say that? Because that's the natural response of every human being who is suddenly confronted with the power and holiness of an almighty God. This display of power on Jesus' part, simply accentuated the flaws in Simon Peter. Think about it. If Peter had even silently questioned why Jesus would want him to go fishing in the middle of the day, if Peter had felt even a little bit of resentment toward Jesus for, you know, telling him how to do his job—then this miracle would expose Peter's thoughts for what they really were, namely, rebellion against God, and a lack of trust in his Word. Peter realized how unworthy he was to be standing in the presence of God. That's why he says, "Go away from me, Lord."

Once again, can you relate? If God were to display on that screen every one of the thoughts you had in the last 24 hours, if he would show how you spent every minute of your time this past week, if he would put on display for all to see every dark desire of your heart, what would your reaction be? Would you hold your head high? Or hang it in shame? Would you run toward a just and holy God who hates sin and must punish it? Or would you run the other way? I know what I would do. I'd join Peter in saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

Fortunately for Peter, and us, Jesus never answered that prayer. Jesus didn't go away from Peter. Instead, he forgave Peter. He comforted Peter. And then, he commissioned Peter. Jesus says to Peter, "*Don't be afraid.* (that's the gospel) *From now on, you will fish for people.*" (that's the call) In other words, here on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus calls Fishermen to be Fishers of Men. He does that I. With the display of power. But more importantly, II. With a word of grace.

I mean, isn't that what Jesus shows to Peter in this situation? By saying to Peter, "Don't be afraid," this just and holy God is basically saying, "Peter, the sin that once separated you from me, the sin that had you rightly wanting to flee for my presence—it's all been paid for. Your sin has been atoned for. In fact, isn't that exactly what happened with the Prophet Isaiah in our Old Testament reading? Isaiah is terrified to stand in the presence of God. He confesses that he is a man of unclean lips. And so, what does God do? He takes a coal from the altar, where the sacrifices for sin were offered, and he says, "*See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*"

If you think about it, hasn't God done the very same thing for you? When you come with a repentant heart to the Lord's table, when that bread and wine touches your lips and with it, the body and blood of the One who is sacrificed on the altar of the cross, at that moment, God says to you, dear Christian, "Your guilt is taken away. And your sin atoned for." That, my friends, is what changes you. Suddenly you don't need to be afraid of a just and holy God, because God has shown you his mercy. You've experienced his grace. And really, that's what equips you and

empowers you to go and share that good news with others. Wasn't that the case with Isaiah? When the Lord says, "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*" What does Isaiah say? "*Here am I. Send me!*" Likewise, Peter, after Jesus assures him that he's not going to leave or forsake him—likewise, Peter hears this beautiful promise from the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus tells Peter, "*From now on, you will fish for people.*" With those words, Jesus is commissioning Peter and his companions to bring the good news of a Savior to all. And how do those men respond to the Savior's call? Luke tells us. *They pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed Jesus.*

My friends, you realize, God has done the very same thing for each one of you. He has commissioned you to be his ambassadors, his representatives to the world, his fishers of men. Now, that's a pretty serious calling. Maybe it has you thinking, "I can't do that. I don't know the Bible well enough. I didn't go to school to be an evangelist." That's okay; neither did Jesus' disciples. Most of them were fishermen. They graduated not from a seminary, but from the school of hard knocks. But that didn't make them any less qualified to share the good news. You might say, it made them more qualified. They knew what life in the real world was like—just like you do.

Or maybe you're thinking, "But I'd feel like a hypocrite. I have just as many sins as than anybody else." Exactly. That's what qualifies you to speak. Who better to tell other sinners about a savior from sin than...a fellow sinner! You know what it feels like to mess up, and yet what it feels like to still be forgiven, to know that God is not holding your sins against you. That same word of grace that Jesus once shared with Peter, he's also shared with each one of us. And it is that grace that qualifies us to be effective fishers of men.

Now, exactly how you'll do you fishing, the various tactics you'll use, may vary from person to person. Maybe you'll use social media, by liking and sharing Bible verses or sermon shorts or Mount Olive posts. Maybe you've got someone in mind to bring with you to our worship services next week, designed with our newcomers in mind. Maybe you're working on building a bridge to that unchurched neighbor or co-worker, so that through your words and actions, the good news of God's love in Christ can transverse the bridge into that person's heart and life. Or maybe you're looking to be part of a larger group of fishermen in an organization like the Friends Network of the Wisconsin Synod.

The bottom line is this. By giving you the gospel, that is by letting you know that God's love covers all your sin for Jesus' sake, God has given you everything you need to be a fisher of men. No matter what body of water God has you fishing in, no matter whether you're fishing in the middle of the day or the middle of the night, because you're going fishing at Jesus' command, because you're trusting in in your own expertise, but in the power of God's Word, you can be sure that God is going to work through you to accomplish his mission of saving precious human souls, one at a time. And for that, we join the Apostle Paul in saying, in Ephesians 3, ²⁰*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,* ²¹*to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*