

## Luke 5:1-11

One time, while the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. <sup>2</sup>He saw two boats there along the lakeshore. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>Jesus got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. He sat down and began teaching the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch.”

<sup>5</sup>Simon answered him, “Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. <sup>7</sup>They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord.” <sup>9</sup>For Peter and all those with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught, <sup>10</sup>and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, “Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people.”

<sup>11</sup>After they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

## What a Catch!

### I.

It has been said that to become an expert at something takes 10,000 hours on average. Of course, to become an expert at one thing might take longer than becoming an expert at something else. Whether or not you consider yourself an expert at anything, there are probably things you are very, very good at.

Everyone has a bad day from time to time, even the experts. It had been a bad day.

Even the experts need the conditions to be right. Perhaps one of the greatest frustrations was, the conditions *had* been right. And still, they had nothing to show for all their expertise.

The expert knows when to call it quits. There will be another day. On *that* day, all the tactics and skill will prove beneficial, as they usually do. Some days things just don’t work out. Admit it and move on.

But even once you’ve called it quits, the day isn’t over. If you don’t take care of your equipment, tomorrow’s attempt isn’t going to work out any better than today’s. So they beached their boats and started taking care of the boats and the nets so that everything would be properly prepared to do it all over again.

The expert, and at least some of his companions, knew Jesus. Last week’s gospel showed us Jesus at Simon’s house. There Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law by rebuking her fever. Simon knew about Jesus. Simon knew Jesus was a great prophet.

When Jesus asked Simon to use his boat as a pulpit, it was only natural for him to do it. He had a great deal of admiration and respect for the man who had healed his mother-in-law, and so many other people in Simon’s town. While Jesus taught the crowd, Simon undoubtedly listened, too.

Eventually the service was over. “When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch’” (Luke 5:4, EHV).

No one who knows me would call me an expert fisherman. No one who knows me would call me a fisherman at all. I get sick on boats. And I don’t like fish, except salmon, so I don’t even call it a fish. *I*, therefore, don’t know whether putting out into deep water was a good location or not. Others have said that, at least in this lake—Gennesaret, or the Sea of Galilee—deep water was not the preferred place to catch fish. During the night was also

apparently the best time to for these commercial fishermen to use their nets.

“Simon answered him, ‘Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets’” (Luke 5:5, EHV). Like me, Jesus was no fisherman, either. I suppose people would think of him as a carpenter, since he had learned the trade from his father. Peter had already seen him in action as someone who could heal people. Jesus certainly knew about the Word of God. Simon had listened to him in his own house days before, and he had just been listening to him preach from the boat used as a pulpit. Did Peter act against his better judgment? Was he complying only to make Jesus feel good?

“When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink” (Luke 5:6-7, EHV). What a catch! Expert that Simon was, I think it’s safe to say he had never seen anything like this. Never—in all his years of fishing—did one cast of one net bring in the kind of haul that this one cast did. *Two* boats could not handle the load. Usually *one* boat would work all night for far less.

## II.

“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord’” (Luke 5:8, EHV).

In a flopping pile of fish and a sinking boat, Peter begs Jesus to just go away. In last week’s gospel, when the people saw how easily Jesus could heal all their diseases, they had the opposite reaction. They chased after Jesus and tried to get him to stick around. The same thing happened when Jesus fed thousands of people with a picnic lunch. People hunted him down because they wanted more. More stuff. More healing.

Peter’s response seems to be incomprehensible. He wanted Jesus to leave, rather than to stay. Why? What is he afraid of?

Do fears tell us something about ourselves? What are *you* afraid of? Are you afraid to die, to hurt, to lose? Are you afraid of the future? Are you afraid of what might happen to you, or that people might find out what you have done? Are you afraid of your boss, your parents, your children?

Our fears, then, tell us about our idols.

The First Commandment teaches us to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” But we don’t. We trust in our expertise. We trust in our own skills. We trust in the connections we have made in the business world and the social world. And when they don’t work out, we are afraid. “Fear” in the context of Luther’s meaning to the First Commandment means to respect. When we are afraid in our lives it shows a lack of trust in God—and a lack of the respect of God Luther calls “fearing” him.

Knee deep in fish on a sinking boat, Peter asked Jesus to go away. Perhaps he *had* been afraid when he wasn’t catching any fish; afraid that he wouldn’t be able to make an adequate living for his family that day. What Jesus had just shown him brought him face to face with all his fears that were really his idols. Peter isn’t afraid of sinking, or even of dying. Now Peter is afraid of Jesus. He is afraid of Jesus’ holiness. He recognizes that Jesus is God and he is afraid. He knew he didn’t deserve to stand in the presence of God.

He’s right to be afraid.

## III.

Jesus could have condemned Peter for his fears and his sin. He could condemn each one of us, because all our fears show that we have other things we trust and love more than we trust and love God.

He didn't, and he doesn't. "Jesus said to Simon, 'Have no fear'" (Luke 5:10, EHV). Jesus told Peter—and he tells us—I did not come to condemn you. I did not come to destroy you. There is nothing to be afraid of. I will take away your sin. The One who can rebuke sickness and demons, as Jesus did in last week's gospel, can eliminate the need for fear of standing before an angry God.

This is the assurance we get every week in worship. We confess our sins to God. As we speak those words of confession—new ones now, that make us think about what we are saying—we speak them already knowing that Jesus came to shoulder our debt of sin, carrying it to the cross to pay for it there. We confess our sins, our fears, our lack of trust in God. There is a sense of anticipation as we speak the confession, knowing that the pastor is going to turn around and announce the forgiveness Jesus won for us.

That sweet message of forgiveness was all tied up in the words: "Have no fear."

#### IV.

"From now on you will be catching people" (Luke 5:10, EHV). Now *that* is scary. Peter certainly did not fully understand everything that would involve, but he knew it was outside his area of expertise.

Boats and nets and the art of commercial fishing he knew. He was good at those things, despite the fact that Jesus had just shown him how inept he really was. Now he was told he would be doing something completely outside his comfort zone. He would learn. He would make mistakes. He would get better at it.

All three of today's readings teach us that God uses ordinary everyday human beings to teach the gospel to others. Isaiah had the same fear Peter did when he was in the presence of God. He knew that he was not good enough to stand before a holy God. But *God* deals with sin. Isaiah was told: "Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven" (Isaiah 6:7, EHV). Then he was sent out to speak God's Word to his people. In the Second Reading Paul said: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, EHV). Jesus didn't pick for his disciples the religious scholars from the temple in Jerusalem, but simple fishermen and tax collectors.

Everyone needs to hear the message about Jesus. Paul says: "How can they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup>And how can they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news of peace, who preach the gospel of good things!'" (Romans 10:14-15, EHV). It might be nice to have so-called "experts" who have gone through college and then to the seminary to prepare to preach the gospel, but that doesn't leave *you* out. *You* are the ones who send out by giving your offerings to Holy Trinity.

Isaiah was intimidated to be called by God. So was Peter. So was I. Each of us had something in common: we are all sinful human beings who did not and do not deserve to be sent out. Did you ever notice how many preachers in the Bible didn't deserve to be preachers? How about Paul, who wrote the Letter to the Romans that the Second Reading was from? He persecuted the church before he was called to be a leader in the church. *Every* preacher of God's Word is a dirty hypocrite.

Every *Christian* is a hypocrite. We all keep sinning, no matter how hard we try not to. Just as he said to Peter, so also Jesus says to each one of us: "Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people" (Luke 5:10, EHV). Jesus didn't just send Peter out with no more knowledge than that; he taught him. In a few weeks you will start to hear about an upcoming Evangelism Bible class. It is to help you be prepared when opportunities for catching people present themselves.

What a catch! Whether you like fish or not, catching people for Jesus is even better. Amen.