

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. ²He saw two boats there along the lakeshore. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³Jesus 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. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch.”

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

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

Unqualified

I.

The doctor walked into the room. Confidently, he laid out exactly what was to happen over the next several hours—and really, the several days that followed after that. He spoke about the procedure to come—a heart bypass operation.

My dad, who was the patient, was impressed with the doctor’s obvious medical knowledge. He asked a question about some other medical concern that had been on his mind. The surgeon said something like: “I deal with this area here. I do one bypass operation a day, five days a week, and all the follow-up care. I’m unqualified to consult with you about other health concerns.”

When you get right down to it, that’s what we want. If you’re chest is going to be opened up for heart bypass surgery, you want the doctor who specializes in that—who is best qualified to meet your needs. If you need help with other medical problems, he’s unqualified—he’s not the right one to answer your questions.

It isn’t just our modern world that specializes. While people in bygone eras might have had a bit more general knowledge, most of them were specialists in certain things, too.

Simon Peter sometimes gets a bad rap. He is often called, probably by me, too, from time to time, an “uneducated fisherman.” That isn’t really accurate. Peter and his fishing buddies weren’t just your typical weekend anglers, they were fully qualified commercial fishermen. They knew everything there was to know about fishing on the Lake of Gennesaret, otherwise known as the Sea of Galilee.

No matter how qualified you are at your specialized craft, some days will be less than optimal. Even on bad days, however, you can’t just close the door to the office or the shop and walk away. Certain things need to be done to get ready for the next day’s work.

After a long night of fishing—they knew that nighttime was better for catching fish on the big lake—the results were awful. Every time they had hauled the nets on board they were empty. But there was other junk tangled up in the nets. There were weeds and random pieces of wood and other debris that needed to be removed. Some of the debris had torn the nets. They needed mending, or the next night’s fishing would be no better. That’s what Peter and his partners were doing on the lakeshore when Jesus walked up.

Peter had known Jesus for a while by this time. He had been with Jesus at that wedding in Cana we talked about a few weeks ago. Apparently, he had gone back to work. Having a nice glass of wine at a wedding feast doesn’t put food on the table, so he got back on board his boat. That was his specialty. That’s the job he was best qualified for.

“[Jesus] saw two boats there along the lakeshore... ³Jesus 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” (Luke 5:2-3, EHV). Jesus wanted to use Peter’s boat as a pulpit. That seemed reasonable. The crowds were pressing around Jesus in excitement. Peter knew that Jesus had many wise things to say about religion and God. He wouldn’t mind hearing a sermon, too. Whatever Jesus needed to accomplish *his* specialty, Peter was willing to help. Cleaning nets and mending them could wait a little while.

Here you are, just like Peter. You have set aside some of the other things going on in your life to sit here in row after row of pews and listen to a message about Jesus. There are plenty of things to do, but they can wait a little while. It’s important to hear about the words and works of Jesus.

II.

Back in my dad’s hospital room, I was standing there listening to all that the surgeon had to say. What if I had told him: “Doctor, I’m a pastor. I want to give you some advice about my father’s surgery”? Those of you who know my vast experience with medical knowledge are laughing out loud right now. If I had done anything like that, the surgeon would have rightly told me: “Pastor, you’re unqualified for surgery; leave the surgery to me. I won’t tell you how to preach, you don’t tell me how to do surgery.”

“When he had finished speaking, [Jesus] said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch’” (Luke 5:4, EHV). Not needing Peter’s boat for a pulpit any longer, Jesus gave some fishing advice.

We’ve already established that Peter was not the weekend angler, but a professional. Day in and day out he fished this lake. He and the others from the two-boat-crew were expert fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They knew just the right times and just the right places to fish. Wouldn’t it be logical for Peter to say: “Look, Jesus, you are great at preaching, and turning water into wine, and healing, but I’m an expert fisherman. You’re unqualified. Leave the fishing to me”?

That’s not what happened. “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). “Jesus, I’m the qualified fisherman, here. I followed all the correct fishing protocols. Still, your word is my command; I’ll go fishing at the wrong time and in the wrong place.”

III.

“When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. ⁷They 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).

You know, spiritual things are the most important things in eternity. Jesus came to accomplish spiritual things; he is the only One qualified for the work he came to do.

Peter hadn’t learned all there is to know about God’s plan of salvation yet. He *did* know that Jesus had always shown himself to be a great Teacher. He *had* seen that miracle at the wedding feast, too—he knew that Jesus had turned gallons and gallons of water into the finest of wines. Though spiritual things are of eternal importance, Jesus wanted Peter to know that physical blessings from him are important, too.

Jesus can—and does—give physical blessings. When he wishes, those blessings come in superabundance. Peter and his partners had a boatload of fish—*two* boatloads of fish—two boats overloaded with fish. All this from just one cast of the nets.

Peter was *not* stupid or uneducated. Peter could see that Jesus was making a claim on him. In the middle of a huge pile of flopping fish, in the middle of a sinking boat, “Peter ... fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord’” (Luke 5:8, EHV).

There was no fear of sinking. Peter wasn’t even afraid of dying. He was afraid of Jesus; afraid of his holiness, and maybe his wrath. Peter knew he was unqualified to even be in the presence of Jesus. He was afraid of the claim Jesus was making on him.

Peter was right to be afraid.

What are you afraid of? Our fears tell us about our idols—our gods. Are you afraid to hurt, to lose, to be lost, to die? Are you afraid of the future, or the past, or what *might* happen, or that people would *find out* what really happened? Are you afraid of your parents, your children, your boss, your neighbor? Are you afraid of pain, afraid of yourself, afraid of the devil? Whatever your fears, those are your gods. They leave us unqualified to stand in the presence of a righteous and holy God.

Peter figured all that out when he was knee-deep in fish. Go away, Jesus. I'm a sinful man. Anyone who is a sinner should rightly be terrified to be around Jesus. By all rights, Jesus should judge us because of our sins.

But he doesn't, does he? "Jesus said to Simon, 'Have no fear'" (Luke 5:10, EHV). That's what he says to you and me, too. Instead of condemning us because of our sin, Jesus came to deal with our sins, once and for all. No one is perfect—but Jesus was and is. No one can ever hope to pay the high price God demands for sin—but Jesus did. After he paid for your sins, Jesus gave you the perfection you need to stand before the Heavenly Father and be called righteous in his sight.

IV.

I left off in the middle of what Jesus said to Peter. "Jesus said to Simon, 'Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people'" (Luke 5:10, EHV).

Peter was wholly unqualified to be a servant of Jesus sent out to preach the gospel to people and show them their Savior. If you know your New Testament Bible history, you know that Peter's record as a disciple of Jesus was rocky, at best. He often wanted the wrong things. He often *said* the wrong things. He was bold at the wrong times, and timid at the wrong times. Peter was completely unqualified to be a messenger for the Savior.

Perhaps you agree with Peter. You see yourself as completely unqualified to be a messenger for Jesus. Did you go to pre-seminary college to study for the ministry? There might be one or two who did that for a little while, but then quit that area of study.

I attended the Seminary, and even graduated. Does that make me, and others like me, qualified to speak God's Word to people? Does it mean I'm qualified to be a pastor?

Nope. You could say that really *noone* is "qualified" to be a messenger for Jesus.

Jesus called the unqualified Peter into that service. At Pentecost, the same Peter who was bold at the wrong times and timid at the wrong times was given the tools he needed to be a spokesman for Jesus. What made him qualified was the call of Jesus to do that work.

Even after he was called, both by the fishing boats and later after Pentecost, Peter still made some mistakes and needed to be corrected. But he was called by Jesus, and he did the work of proclaiming Jesus to others.

I make mistakes. Lots of them. What qualifies me to stand before you and present God's Word to you is the divine call Holy Trinity congregation has given me to be your pastor.

You make mistakes. Lots of them. You might think you're unqualified to speak God's Word to people, because you didn't learn Greek or Hebrew like pastors do, or because you don't know God's Word as much as you *think* you *should* if you are going to proclaim Jesus and his salvation. But you *are*. What qualifies you is that you are a child of God. Jesus' Great Commission wasn't really just for "professional" preachers of God's Word, but for all who follow Jesus.

You are qualified to catch people, just as Peter was. Don't be afraid to do that, whether you're a fisherman, a factory worker, a surgeon, or whatever vocation you find yourself in. Throw out the net of the gospel. You are qualified. Amen.