

Jesus calls you to follow him!

It's not surprising that, wherever Jesus went, crowds gathered. People wanted to be healed of their sicknesses, for sure. But they were also drawn to what Jesus was saying. They were eager to hear that God loves and forgives them. So, it's not surprising that a crowd gathered around Jesus when he was by the shore of the Sea of Gennesaret (also called the Sea of Galilee). Nor is it surprising that Jesus went into a boat to get a little ways from the shore so that his voice would spread out and reach more ears. Nor is it surprising that Jesus borrowed the boat of Simon Peter since he already knew him. Luke 5 takes place fairly early in Jesus' ministry. Peter, James and John had been with Jesus, but they were not yet staying with him full-time. What was surprising is that after Jesus finished preaching to the crowd, he told Simon (:4), **"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."**

Simon was not so eager to go fishing. He was probably thinking something like; "Jesus, you are a carpenter and I am the professional fisherman. The best fishing takes place during the cool hours of the night. And if you are using nets, it's silly to put the nets down in the deep part of the lake because the fish will just swim under it. Jesus, we've been up all night long. We are tired and disappointed. It's the wrong time and place to fish." He relented (:5), **"But because you say so, I will let down the nets for a catch."**

Peter was more than surprised when the nets started filling with fish – so many and so fast that the net started to pull the boat under the water. Peter and his workers called for James and John to help them. Peter saw Jesus turn water into wine, and heal his mother-in-law just by speaking a word, and healing many others simply by touching them, but this was different. Peter did not know much about making wine or medicine, but he certainly knew about fishing. He knew that fishing with a net in the deep part of the lake during the day was foolish. When the fish filled his nets, he was astonished! As Peter was struggling to keep his boat afloat and his profit from swimming away, the light bulb in his brain finally turned on. This was an amazing miracle! If Jesus could perform this kind of miracle, then he must be true God.

Suddenly, Simon did not care so much about the fish. He dropped to his knees and said (:8), **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"** Notice that when Simon reluctantly agreed to let down the nets he called Jesus **"Master,"** as in, "You're the boss. I'll do what you say." But after the impressive miracle, he called Jesus **"Lord."** Peter came to a greater awareness of who Jesus was and he was terrified. Peter felt like some students in Orland Park, IL, last Friday. Their school bus stalled on the railroad tracks and a train was coming. Fortunately, the driver was able to get all the children off the bus in time before the train came. For a moment, they must have thought that they were as good as dead. Or imagine someone bragging to his new neighbor how he got away with cheating on his Income Tax for years and then the new neighbor told him that he worked for the IRS. Oh no! But it was even worse for Simon. He was not just going to have to pay a huge penalty and spend a few years in prison. Simon could expect to pay for his sins with an eternity in the prison of hell.

Notice what Peter confessed. He did not say that he cursed, or murdered, or stole anything. He did not admit to getting drunk and abusing his wife, or not going to church. In fact, Simon could have even pointed out that he had just obeyed Jesus by letting down the nets. But none of that mattered. Simon simply confessed that he was a sinner. The Holy Spirit uses Peter's reaction this morning to remind us that we are also sinful. Simply being born to sinful parents makes us sinful, as we confess at the start of our worship, **"I am sinful by nature."** Sin is not just bad things that we do or good things that we fail to do. Sin is also a condition, like a deadly disease. Even when we are sleeping, we are sinful. When we are confronted with the purity and perfection of God, when we hear his perfect commands and his exacting demand for obedience, we feel just like Simon did. God is high and holy, perfect and pure, and we are the opposite. We can not hide or make excuses. All we can do is confess, **"Lord, I am sinful."**

Simon Peter is known for opening his mouth without thinking just as he did here in Luke 5. Simon said (:8), **"Go away from me, Lord."** Bad idea. He did not stop to think that since he was sinful, he needed Jesus to stay with him, not to go away. Fortunately, Jesus did not do what Simon asked for. Neither did Jesus say things like, "Peter, don't be so hard on yourself. Stop that negative thinking about being sinful. You try hard to be good most of the time. You are better than others." None of that nonsense. He simply said (:10), **"Don't be afraid."** "Peter, if I wanted to treat you as your sins deserve, I could have done that from heaven.

Instead, I took on flesh and came to be with you. I knew you were a sinner before this miracle of fish and I still got into the boat with you. I want to be with you. I want to take your sins away from you and carry them to a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. I want to give you my purity and perfection.”

Jesus knows that we are sinful – full of sin. He knows that we deserve to be forsaken by God. He knows that we can not survive in the presence of our high and holy God, and so, Jesus veils his divinity behind his human nature. In the face of Jesus, we see a loving and forgiving God. What he said to Peter, he says to you, “**Don’t be afraid.**” “I came to be your substitute, to live and die and rise for you, to be forsaken by God so you wouldn’t be. I came to make you holy. I came to save you. Don’t be afraid. You will spend eternity with me in the happiness of heaven.” Like Peter, we gain a greater awareness of who Jesus is.

That alone would be enough for Peter and us to collapse in front of God with a huge sigh of relief and say, “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” with every breath for all of eternity. But Jesus takes his love up still another notch. He said to Simon, (:10), “**from now on, you will fish for people.**” Jesus does not just forgive Simon, he also promises to use him in his kingdom work. Who could have guessed that? Simon is known for sticking his foot in his mouth and denying – three times! – that he even knew Jesus after spending three years with him. THAT unworthy Simon was going to be Jesus’ ambassador to the world? From our perspective, Simon was a most unlikely candidate to tell the world about salvation through Jesus.

From God’s perspective, though, Simon was the perfect person for doing mission work. Who better than Simon to look another sinner in the eye and say, “I know how you feel. If Jesus forgave me, then he will certainly forgive you also.” Simon understood the relief and joy of being forgiven. Jesus called Peter away from his job as a fisher of fish, to being a fisher of people. A literalistic translation of verse 10 would be, “from now on, you will live-catch people.” It’s an unusual word, but it has great meaning. When people are caught by the gospel, they are actually freed from sin and death. When you catch a fish, it dies. When people are caught by the net of the gospel, however, they do not die. They live forever! Charged up with Jesus’ promise of live-catching souls for heaven, Simon and the others (:11), “**pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.**”

We have a lot in common with Simon. We, also can relate to other sinners. We understand the shame of realizing that we have done and said some really bad things and hurt and disappointed others. We know how selfish and shameful thoughts pop into our minds. We understand the frustration of living in a sin-infected world where nothing is ever truly perfect. We are not shining examples of what it means to be a Christian. People do not stand in awe of us for being shining super saints. A father was very frustrated with his 19-year-old daughter who was living a shameful life. He kept reaching out to her, but she was set in her ways. Finally, he opened up his past to her and shared the sinful things he had done at her age. She listened to that. Then he told her how Jesus helped him change directions. His daughter changed because a caring Christian was able to relate to her. It is very easy to think, “Lord, I do not know how you could love me after all the things I have done wrong. I am a sinner and I feel worthless. I am not worthy to represent you to the world.” Jesus, however, says that he loves you and you are worth dying for and he proved it by taking all of your sin and guilt to the cross where he washed it away with his blood. All of your sins have already been forgiven. You are destined for heavenly glory.

Not only does Jesus save you, but he even shows you extra love by using you to help his kingdom work. You are – so to speak – a satisfied customer of the gospel. Jesus called Simon to serve in his kingdom and you have the same commission, even though you are not doing it full-time. Yes, there are mission fields all over the globe. Keep praying for them and supporting them with your offerings. But each one of us has our own mission field – people with whom we come into contact at work, school, neighborhood, gymnasium and other places. Wherever you are in life, God uses you to touch the lives of others. You share the love of Jesus as you show kindness and help to others, starting with your own family. You support the Lord’s kingdom work as you pray for this ministry and support it with your offerings and efforts. As God gives you the opportunity, you can tell others that Jesus loves them to death and that there’s a physical heaven waiting for them. You can tell them how much it means to you to have Jesus as your Savior. You can express how the Lord has blessed you physically and especially spiritually. Just as Jesus called Simon to follow him, Jesus is calling you to follow him through life on earth to eternal and glorious life in heaven. Jesus is calling you to follow him. Will you? [pause] Amen.