

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 6, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 5:1-10

THEME: FISHING FOR MEN

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, **2** and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. **3** Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. **4** And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." **5** And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." **6** And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. **7** They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. **8** But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." **9** For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, **10** and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." [a] **11** And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

In the name of Jesus:

I will readily admit, I am not a fisherman. I have only been fishing a handful of times, once when the boys were little during a promotion called Fish Free Ohio Day. It was a day sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources, encouraging adults to take children fishing for the fun of it. You didn't have to purchase a fishing license, you just grab a fishing pole, along with some bait and hooks, and go fishing.

On that day the fish weren't biting. I recall we waited, and waited, and waited for a bite. We would look into the lake and see the fish swimming up to bait, then swim away. It was frustrating, an exercise in patience. I thought during this exercise in futility that the only thing I was going to catch was a cold. But near the end, the boys caught a pair of fish, we hauled them in, then released them. It was fun, it was a lesson in being patient, and an enjoyable time was had by all.

I was thinking about that day when I read the Gospel lesson for today. It is a familiar story of Peter, the expert fisherman, attempting to catch fish. He had spent a long day catching absolutely nothing. After this fruitless exercise, Peter hauls in his nets and begins to clean them. Jesus is nearby, speaking to the crowds from one of Peter's boats just off shore. Peter probably doesn't mind, figuring that at least Someone will get some use out of his fishing boat. After Jesus finishes speaking, He turns to Peter and tells him to throw his nets back into the water for a catch of fish. Peter shows his respect for Jesus, first by addressing Him as Master, and then doing what Jesus told him to do while interjecting, "we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Peter had long given up trying to catch fish, but Jesus had other ideas. Jesus asks Peter to go against his conventional wisdom and experience and to just trust Jesus on this one. Peter does, and when he does

he hauls in a boat load of fish, so much fish that they had to enlist the help of the other fishermen in the other boats because the nets were breaking.

Peter's response is interesting. As a businessman, one would think that Peter would want to cash in on Jesus' ability to perform this miracle. Just think, if Jesus could produce this many fish at one setting, how much fish could Jesus bring to Peter during his lifetime? Peter would be not only rolling in fish but rolling in dough. He could franchise his fishing business, retire early, and live on Easy Street. Peter could ask Jesus to work with him, "just you and me, Jesus" and Peter would be set for life!

Peter doesn't do that, he instead falls down at Jesus' feet and replies: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In that moment, that encounter with Jesus, Peter's life was changed. His focus was not on his business but the Lord's work. Peter has now a new calling, Peter followed Jesus and became a fisher of men.

Jesus has called you to follow Him. Like Peter, you are a sinner. But you have been saved by God's grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your sins are forgiven. You have been given a new name, a new calling, you have been placed in Christ in the waters of Baptism to live and serve the Lord in all you do. Jesus calls you to be a fisher of men, to live your life in such a winsome way that others will see the love and light of Christ through you and by the

power of the Spirit believe in Jesus. You are His disciple, in this time, and in this place, to speak to others the Good News of salvation that is for all through faith in Jesus.

But, to be honest, it hasn't been all that productive fishing for men. You have tried to share your faith with your neighbor, but your neighbor keeps putting you off. Time and time again you witness Jesus but nothing seems to work. Like Peter, you keep putting your nets down for a catch, it seems as if you have been fishing all night for Jesus and there is nothing to show for all of your work. But, dear friend, the Lord's work is never in vain.

Know this about Jesus, He always forgives. He forgives you of all of your sins. He forgives you the times when you have been silent to speak as a witness about Him to others. He forgives you your feeble attempts to witness. He forgives you your past, and your present sins and He will forgive you all of your upcoming sins.

This is why Luther is able to remark, "sin boldly," that is, go forward in faith, living your life confidently in His forgiveness and love, knowing that His hand is a forgiving hand, one that leads you, guides you, and strengthens you. He forgives you as He forgave Peter of the times of His lack of faith, His denials, and His feeble witness. And Jesus empowered Peter to go forth in the joy of the knowledge of the forgiveness of all of his sins, so that Peter was enabled

and emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the love and forgiveness of Jesus to others. And the Holy Spirit used that witness of Peter, as He will use your witness, to make you to become a fisher of men, winning souls to Jesus, to whom gets all the glory and praise.

So go fishing my friend for Jesus, knowing that He loves you and forgives you. He is patient with you and patient with others. He wants all to believe and come to faith. So when your witness seems ineffective, realize that the Lord is using you, your words and actions, to plant the seeds of faith in those around you. And He will work faith in His time and in His choosing. To His glory and honor. In Jesus' name.

Amen