

This sermon was preached by Pastor Heather Wigdahl on Sunday, February 7, 2010.

## The Holy Gospel according to Luke, the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter:

### Luke 5:1-11

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught 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, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, **he fell down at Jesus’ knees**, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. **The gospel of the Lord.** Thanks be to God!

Last summer, I went fishing. For the first time in over 20 years. Needless to say, it didn’t go so well for me. I couldn’t remember even how to cast, let alone which lure to use—even though I grew up fishing the lakes and rivers of MN, the crick out back of our pasture—not a lot of fish there—STILL, as I stood in a boat with a rod in my hand, it did not come back to me whatsoever.

In contrast to my **lack of knowledge**, there stood next to me, my friend Josh—who also grew up fishing, *but* has continued that practice. HE knew well, the lake we were on—like the back of his hand. He knew right where to go for fish, he knew what kind of lure worked best, and of course, *he knew how to cast...*the difference between us: HE KNEW how to FISH. I did not.

That experience comes to mind for me in reading our gospel this morning, because Simon Peter, James and John **knew how to fish**. Fishing was their livelihood, their business.

And they knew Lake Gennesaret (i.e. the Lake of Galilee) like that back of their hands. When Jesus, who let me remind you, *grew up a carpenter*, tells them to head back out for one more attempt, it seems to me it would have felt a lot like ME trying to give my friend Josh *pointers* on his casting technique. Sort of ridiculous!

And not only that, those fishermen had been *fishing all night*—prime fishing time, AND had caught NOTHING. By the time Jesus is done teaching the crowd that morning, they had their nets *clean* and they were ready to wash up, themselves; get some breakfast, after a long, disappointing night.

You know how there are better and worst times to ask someone for something? Kids, you know that's true of your parents. Parents, adults, you know is true with spouses, friends, colleagues. **Timing** is *everything*, if you really want to convince someone of something.

But making a request of someone, when they are tired, dirty, stressed out, hungry, down-right irritable, is usually not the best time to ask. It sure seems to me that Jesus couldn't have picked a *worst* time to tell those dirty fishermen to throw their clean nets out into the deep water. **I** think Simon Peter was pretty tactful when he answered Jesus' request, "*Master, we've worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*" **Pause for possible change of mind?** NO? Okay, alright then.

You know, for all the times that Jesus' disciples seem to *disobey him*, and *make mistakes*; for all the occasions they're *confused* about who Jesus really *is* and about what he is *trying to teach them*—HERE, in this moment, maybe we see why Jesus *chose them, in the first place*.

In spite of their often named shortcomings, when Jesus tells them to go, to try one more time, they did. Even though they would have rather gone home. Even though they *thought* they knew better. Even though they were *pretty sure* they had that whole "fishing thing" figured out. And they were *pretty sure* they knew what was possible, and what **THEY** themselves were capable of...but then along comes Jesus, and surprises them with what God can do through them. A glimpse of what will come, as those first disciples help to build the church.

They could've come up with lots of GREAT excuses: "We're too tired." "We've already tried that." "Maybe another day." or "What do you know about fishing? Why don't you just stick to a hammer?!"

**We have our own excuses too:** "My plate is too full." "I'm too old." or "I'm too young." "I don't know how to do that," or "I've already done that, someone else is better."

The danger with such excuses—while *sometimes* honest and valid—is that *often* they aren't—often they are *just* excuses, *that we hide behind* because we're afraid of taking that step. Maybe afraid of failing. Or disappointing ourselves or others. But that step might just be the very step that **opens up a fuller, more faithful tomorrow** for us.

Peter, James and John took that step. And they caught fish, where they thought there were none. God surprised them, and oh how they were overwhelmed by it! Sometimes I think we might be a little afraid of THAT, too. What if we DO have a really positive experience and make connections in faith that WILL change our lives. It can be scary to actively seek to let go of *our* control like that.

It was true for Simon Peter, just like it was true for Isaiah, in our first reading too. They both fall on their knees when confronted with the wonder and power of God. "*Woe is me!*" Isaiah says. "*Go away from me!*" Peter says. Brought close to God's presence, they realize how insignificant they are in comparison. Looking in the face of absolute Love and infinite Grace, they can see all that they are **not**. As Eugene Peterson paraphrases it, "*Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.*" **Both Isaiah and Peter in the face of the holy, feel exposed with nowhere to hide.**

That's CAN HAPPEN when we look at Jesus. The closer we look at HIM, the more clearly we see ourselves: our sin; our selfishness; our short-sightedness, our failure of nerve. We see all the ways we haven't lived up to our faith potential...or fully **used** the gifts God's given us.

When we really look at Jesus, we understand why Peter would say, "Leave me alone." But here's the thing: Jesus never does. Instead, Jesus says, "do not be afraid."

I read somewhere that those words appear 365 times in the Bible. I've never counted myself, nor do I intend to, but for every fear we have, the promise of God answers them. Do not be afraid, for I am right here with you.

I still remember a poster from my high school guidance counselor's office that said: "*A ship in harbor is safe. But that's not what ships are built for.*" **We** have been

**built**—*created*—to love and serve, to share and celebrate, to honor and create, to support and encourage, to sacrifice and build up.

Do not be afraid, Jesus says. To use the gifts in you. To let God make them grow. There simply aren't any excuses worthy of preventing you from growing in faith. They are just not good enough.

I was thinking of Glen this past week, a 97 year old member of my former congregation—some of you have actually met him, because he has visited me here. He is a very young 97, I tell you what.

Glen grew up Lutheran, and went to church every Sunday, but he never attended confirmation classes, and he always felt that because of that, he didn't know enough. The loss of his parents at a young age sent him out west, without even completing the second grade. It was as an adult that he finally learned to *read*, his wife actually taught him using their family Bible. But Glen *never went through* confirmation classes—and it bothered him.

On his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, he decided he was too old to worry about what the men at local café coffee hour would say. So he signed up for confirmation classes. And I tell you what, those 3 years were as *enlightening* and *memorable* for ME and my other *students*, as they were for Glen, for certain!

On the day we celebrated his Affirmation of Baptism, the whole congregation was *empowered* and *enlivened* along with him. It was a great day.

We all have opportunities before us, big and small, every day, to serve—to follow—to go into deeper waters, to try again, even if we've failed before. And it *matters*, not just to ourselves, but to everyone around us.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus says. Because I need YOU to fish for people. Literally, in Greek it **says**, "from now on, you will be **catching alive**—making alive"—"*You will be restoring people to life and strength.*" That will be our vocation as Christians, as the church: To enliven. To inspire. *We do this a lot of different ways.* Through mission trips, through teaching Sunday School, through sharing food, through bravely signing up for confirmation classes. Every way that our personal story somehow becomes a part of God's bigger story, WILL inspire and enliven someone else. God in Christ calls us, as we are, to step out in ways that allow God to better make us into who we can be.

There was a *great* cartoon in a New Yorker magazine with the caption: "*This morning opportunity knocked at my door, but by the time I pushed back the bolt, turned the two locks, unlatched the chain, and shut off the alarm system it was gone.*"

The good news is that God is *more persistent* than that. God's voice is right here with us: "Don't be afraid."

Many centuries ago, Sir Francis Drake wrote:

*"Disturb us Lord,*

*When we are too well pleased with ourselves;*

*When our dreams have come true—because we dreamed too little.*

*When we arrived safely—because we sailed too close to shore."*

Or as Garrison Keillor would put it: "*Faith is to get up and do what needs to be done.*"

God confronts us with what *might be*, and though we may feel unworthy, God calls us into it, anyway. May we, like Isaiah, Peter, James, John, *and* Glen, answer that call:

"here I am, Lord. Send me." Amen.