

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany; February 6, 2022

+ Luke 5:1-11 +

“Follow Jesus and Fish without Fear”

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

Simon answered him, “Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets.” 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. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord.” For Peter and all those with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught, 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.”

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

When Jesus says to Simon Peter, “Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people,” there are many reasons for Peter to listen to him.

First, this is not the first time Jesus and Peter have met. After Jesus was rejected in his hometown, he moved on to Capernaum. He taught the people about the kingdom of heaven, proclaiming the good news of salvation. He also drove out demons and healed diseases. Among those he healed was Peter’s own mother-in-law. **Jesus got up, left the synagogue, and went into Simon’s house. Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. They asked him to help her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.**

So, even before Jesus arrives on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Peter has heard all about him. Peter has also seen his power up close. And then, on this day, Peter hears again. **[Jesus] saw two boats there along the lakeshore. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Jesus got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. He sat down and began teaching the crowds from the boat.** Jesus is not asking this favor from a stranger. Peter has already heard his message and seen his power. But now, Peter gets to hear Jesus teach again.

And then, Peter gets to see his power again. After a long night of fishing the way a fisher is supposed to fish, Peter and his partners have come up empty. Then, Jesus instructs them to fish the way you’re not supposed to fish on that lake: late in the morning, in deep water. And the result is a catch so heavy that the nets begin to break.

At least twice, Peter hears Jesus’ message. At least twice, he sees his power. And so, when Jesus says, **“Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people”**, Peter has reason to listen and to follow.

He also has reasons not to listen. He has reasons to fear following Jesus. First, Peter apparently has a family to care for. Following Jesus to catch people will mean leaving those who need him to care for them.

Second, Peter has a business. Following Jesus to catch men will mean leaving his livelihood. Also, Peter has a coworkers. He speaks to Jesus about **we** and hear about **partners**. Anyone who cares at all about those he works with thinks long and hard about the impact his departure would have on them.

There are reasons to listen to Jesus. There are reasons not have no fear, to leave everything, to follow Jesus and work to catch people. There are also reasons to be afraid and to refuse him.

Jesus calls us to follow him unafraid and to work for him too. He calls us, like Peter and the rest of his disciples, to join him in the work of catching people. He calls us to speak his saving gospel to all around us, to lower the nets of God's Word into our world, trusting the Spirit to work and snag one soul at a time for Jesus and his heavenly kingdom.

There are many ways to follow Jesus and carry out this call. There are specific calls to disciples like Peter, to missionaries and pastors to proclaim Jesus' promises publicly. Not everyone has a call from Jesus like that; most don't. But he does call everyone to fish unafraid for people. He gives us families to speak to, as well as well as friends and coworkers. He gives us resources to pay for those pastors and missionaries. He gives us all the powerful privilege of prayer to ask for his kingdom to come and spread.

The opportunities to follow Jesus' call and fish for men are as wide and varied as each of our individual lives. Some opportunities, like prayer, we all have in common. Other opportunities are unique to each individual, and that requires some thought and examination of our individual lives. Where and how can you personally drop the net of Jesus' gospel and fish for people? Wherever you can, however you can, Jesus calls you to follow him and do it unafraid.

Like Peter, we have reasons to listen and follow and fish without fear. Peter saw Jesus' power and heard Jesus preach and teach about himself and about his heavenly kingdom. So have we. And he has caught us with his love. Jesus' love, proclaimed to us, has snagged our hearts out of the deep, dark sea of unbelief and brought us to faith. We have heard and believed what Jesus has done for us.

You have probably seen bumpers and t-shirts and necklaces in the shape of a fish, and you know that this is a symbol for Christianity. You probably also know that this symbol was chosen by Christians as a code word and signal to indicate their faith in Jesus, especially during times of persecution. In casual conversation, a friend might speak to another about "fishing," or draw a fish in the sand with a stick. Then that friend, if he was also a Christian, would also drop in little references to fish or fishing.

This is because the Greek word for fish forms an acronym that stands for the Greek words, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." But I often wonder, why that code word? Why that symbol? It does form a neat little message. But they could have chosen anything. One reason, I guess, is that fish were a staple and fishing was a common activity, so dropping it into conversations and making little pictures of fish wouldn't seem suspicious. But it may also be that members of the early New Testament Church, and we members of it today, are fish ourselves.

The Holy Spirit, using people like Peter and people like us, has cast the net of the Jesus' loving gospel. And he's caught us up in it. That day on the shore of Galilee, Peter said to Jesus, **"Go away from me, because I am sinful man, Lord."** That's the only thing we have a right to say to the Son of God. We're sinful; he's holy. By all rights, he should just go away from us forever and leave us in condemnation. But Jesus has come to us because he loves. He has come into our world, preaching to people like you and me. He has come so close to us that he became one of us, to be holy in our place. With his death on the cross he took

our sins away, to bring us to himself forever. On Easter he rose so that we will rise and live with him, at his side forever.

Jesus does not go away from sinners. He comes to them. He loves them. He saves them. And when they hear it and believe, they come to him. They're caught in his love, and they're with him forever. Like Peter, we have heard Jesus say, and watched him do, amazing things. He has also come to us in love. We've seen him save us. So, like Peter, we have reasons to listen and to follow when he calls us: **"Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people."**

But like Peter, we also have our reasons to be afraid to follow Jesus and fish for people. It is scary to speak about Jesus to people we love, let alone those we may not know so well. We do not know ahead of time whether they will believe in him or reject him, and we fear the consequences if they don't. With so much else to do and to pay for, it's intimidating to commit the time for prayer or the money for the workers for the spread of his gospel. It also takes time and effort also to look at our individual lives – because everyone's situation is different, and our opportunities to do this work are as diverse as our lives.

First, it is right to thank God for giving us the strength to answer this call. Jesus love has supplied us with the strength to answer this call. And that has shown itself in our lives. We have answered the call to fish for people. We have spoken; we have prayed; we have offered money; we have contemplated how do it in more and more ways. Thank God for working in us with his love to follow Jesus and work to catch people!

But it's also right to confess that our response to answer this call to fish unafraid has not been perfect. We do sometimes show fear to follow Jesus and fish fearlessly for people with his love. We ask him for forgiveness. We have it. And we know we have it because of the loving gospel he's caught us with. Jesus who did not turn away from sinful Peter. He came close and called him to fish. He has done the same for us. So we now ask him: "Jesus, make us whom you've caught totally unafraid to follow your call and fish for people. Jesus, you can do this for us. Please do it." And trust he will.

He called humble fisherman to join him because he was on a mission to save. You see, this visit to the Sea of Galilee marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Until now, as far as we know, Jesus has been at it himself, preaching and teaching by himself and healing and driving out demons solo.

But he can't do that forever. His Father has a set time for Jesus to complete his holy life and to die on the cross. He has a time set for Jesus to rise from the dead. And after his work of saving us is complete, Jesus will return to his Father's side.

And so, before that time comes, Jesus calls disciples. He calls them to learn from him more and more, to grow in their knowledge of God's Word. He calls them to grow in faith. He calls them to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. He calls them to preach and teach and fish for people after Jesus' work is complete, after he's returned to the Father.

And they do it. Do they ever do it! They do it because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit chose them, trained them in the truth, and gave them strength in the gospel. They fished without fear. And for two thousand the expedition has continued all over the world, gathering countless Christian fish for the kingdom of God.

Jesus is still working through his people to catch even more people with his gospel. This work is continuing with us. May we answer his call and work fearlessly to catch people. Because Jesus has come close to us

sinners. He has saved us, and caught us for him with that saving love. Now he calls us to follow him, fishing without fear. So **“have no fear. From now on you will be catching people.”** Amen.