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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 7, 2010
Text: Luke 5:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Bible readings used in our worship services over the past couple of weeks have shown Jesus to be quite busy. He's been preaching the good news of God's kingdom in Nazareth, His hometown, as well as in the water-side city of Capernaum. The demons have run away in terror at the command of our Lord. And Jesus healed every form of sickness and disease, including a high-fever afflicting Peter's mother-in-law. All this preaching and healing activity created quite a stir in the northern regions of Galilee. Everyone is captivated with Jesus. The crowds are flocking to Him to hear His powerful teaching and receive His healing touch.

That's why Jesus needed to borrow a boat from Simon Peter. The crowds were pressing in on Him so closely that He didn't have room to preach God's word. According to Luke 5:3 Peter rowed Jesus out into the Sea of Gennesaret, better known to us as the Sea of Galilee, and began preaching to the ever-growing crowd. We don't know exactly what Jesus said nor do we know how long He preached. At this point in Luke's gospel, those details aren't important.

This fishing story has another purpose. It teaches us 1) what kind of people Jesus calls to be His disciples and 2) how people become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. And these are powerful lessons indeed, so powerful, they impact each of us to this very day.

Once Jesus had finished His preaching and teaching, Jesus turns to Simon and, according to vs. 4, instructs him to "put out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch." Peter is confused. He's a professional fisherman. He knows from past experience when to fish and when not to fish on the Sea of Galilee. And the daytime is definitely NOT the time for fishing. In vs. 5, Peter says, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." It's a fool's errand but Jesus did heal Peter's mother-in-law, so the least Peter can do is humor Jesus and do what He says.

Suddenly, the net became incredibly heavy. It's filled with fish. The nets are so full that they are starting to break (vs. 6). This is a catch of a lifetime. Peter signals to his partners to come quickly and help him lest he lose this great catch. The second boat arrives. The men work feverishly to get the fish out of the net into the boats. But the fish keep coming. Luke informs us in vs. 7 that the boats were so full of fish that they began to sink.

Peter has been working feverishly to bring in the fish. And suddenly, in a moment of transcendent clarity, Peter realizes that Jesus is no ordinary man. And this great catch of

fish is no ordinary struck of good fortune. This is a divine encounter. God is up close and personal. He's in the boat looking at Peter. In one sense, Peter's trapped. He's in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. You just can't walk or run away.

Peter is terrified. What started out as a dream-come-true catch of a lifetime has now spiraled out of control. Peter's afraid because he's starting to get an idea of who Jesus really is. He's holy, righteous, and pure. He has power over demons and diseases—he's seen that already— but now even creation itself. He knows where the fish are, commands them to enter the net, and they obey. All these things are telling Peter that Jesus is God.

And Peter definitely knows who he is. He's a sinner, a man who breaks God's commandments and does things that aren't pleasing to our Lord. In fear and shame, Peter falls at Jesus' knees and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (vs. 8).

All of this divine power is scarring Peter witless. The powerful teachings, the miracles, the healings, the great catch of fish bring no comfort to Peter. At first, this might seem strange to us. We'd like to see some of God's divine power every once in a while. Peter's reaction teaches us something about God and about us human beings. God's divine power always terrifies us, and I stress the word *always*.

Anytime the Bible tells us about someone coming into God's presence or experiencing God's divine power up-close and personal, those same people are terrified. Just look at Isaiah's reaction to seeing God high and lifted up. "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5) Other examples include Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit, Moses on Mount Sinai, Samson's parents, Gideon, Mary the mother of our Lord, Peter in the boat, Paul on the Damascus road, John on the island of Patmos, and others.

Peter realizes that he's in God's presence. He can't hide or runaway so he begs Jesus to leave. I'm a sinner. I'm afraid. God get away from me lest I die!

Yes, you must know, and I suspect that you already do, that to come into God's direct presence creates fear, doubt, terror, and shame. That's one thing our Gospel reading teaches us. But there is something else it teaches us and it's found in the words of our Lord Jesus. He says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (vs. 10). Peter was afraid of God's presence and power. But God speaks to Peter and says, "Don't be afraid. It's ok to be in My presence."

There are few things you need to notice about how Jesus' deals with Peter. First of all, He doesn't argue with Peter's confession about being a sinner. You should also notice that Jesus doesn't leave nor does He tell Peter to leave. And Jesus doesn't give Peter a 10-step program on how to stop being a sinner.

When Christians mess-up, they're tempted to become fearful and think they can't come to church and receive the good things of God; at least, not until they get everything straightened out. They act as if Jesus quit saying "Don't be afraid," as if their baptism stopped being true, as if the body and blood Jesus shed for the forgiveness of their sins lost its effectiveness. But none of that's true.

Thanks be to God Jesus doesn't do what Peter says. Instead, our Lord speaks words of grace, forgiveness, and peace. Don't be afraid. His love and grace are greater, infinitely greater than our sin, shame, and fear.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes even further. He calls Peter to discipleship out of pure grace. "From now on you will be catching men" is Peter's call to discipleship. Please note this, dear people of God. Jesus isn't ashamed to call sinners to be His followers. It's sinners who are afraid of God's divine power that Jesus wants to be with Him. If you take a quick look at those who follow Jesus in the NT gospels you'll find he attracts sinners of all sorts to Himself: ordinary people like fishermen, social outcast like tax collectors, prostitutes, the demon possessed, the infirm, the poor, political terrorists (that's what today we'd call Simon the Zealot, one of Jesus' 12 apostles), soldiers, adulterers, and betrayers.

These are the kinds of people Jesus calls by grace into His one, holy Christian and apostolic church. Sinners. Poor, miserable sinners. Sinners like you and me. And He says to us all, "Do not be afraid." To be a member of His Church is to receive in faith His invitation to walk in His forgiveness, to be filled with His love and grace, to be guided by His Holy Spirit in discipleship, to become a new person altogether, born anew in righteousness, peace, and holiness.

Remember I said today's gospel reading from Luke 5 teaches us what kind of people Jesus calls to be His disciples and how they become disciples. If this were catechism class I might give you a pop quiz to see if you were listening. It's sinners that Jesus calls to discipleship, and only sinners. That's the who. By grace through forgiveness Jesus calls them to discipleship. That's the how.

You are evidence that Jesus still continues to call all sorts of people unto Himself. You are here by God's grace. Don't be afraid. You are caught by Jesus. You are His. And He is yours for all eternity.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.