

Text: Luke 5:1-11. Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. February 10, 2019.

Don't be afraid. Your sin is taken away and your guilt atoned for. Amen.

Do you like to fish? I know, a bunch of people are really paying attention now and another bunch couldn't care less. But whether or not you like to fish, I think we could all agree that this would be a cool fishing trip. You go fishing. Throw your line in the water. Fish start jumping in the boat. Or if you get seasick, you are fishing from the pier and fish just start jumping on the pier. Wow! That would be awesome! I personally don't have much patience for fishing, but if fishing went like that, I think I could get into it. The fish just jump into the boat. The fish just start jumping onto the pier. Jesus doesn't command us to fish. But he does tell us we will fish for people. We have a mission greater than catching fish. Our mission is to catch people's souls for Jesus. Think about that! Catching souls for Jesus. Fishing for people. And over and over and over again, our fishing trip for people goes like the awesome fishing trip I described above. Put your line in the water and the fish jump in the boat. Get out and spread the good news and God brings the increase. God will bring the catch when you fish for people. And you will fish for people.

Look at the all the people who were already caught! The people were crowding around Jesus. They were pushing up against him. They couldn't get close enough to him. Jesus was like the rock star at a rock concert. The best seats were up front. Why? They were listening to the Word of God. Did you catch that? They were listening to the Word of God. It doesn't say they were listening to Jesus, as though they were just listening to the man. They were listening to the message. They were listening to the Word of God. They couldn't get enough. They couldn't get close enough. They couldn't listening closely enough. They literally pushed Jesus into the water there were so many crowding and pressing and pushing to listen to the Word of God.

Does that inspire you or put you to shame? Maybe a little of both. Do we crowd around to listen to the Word of God? Do we consider the best seats up front? Do we race here early because we don't want to miss one minute? Is writing a sermon just another to do? Do we love to be in the fellowship hall to eat treats or to be in Bible study? Are we more excited when it's one preacher than another, as though only one brings the Word of God? Maybe those questions seem harsh. But an honest look at ourselves shows our sins.

That's why we hear God's Word. Because only God's Word gives us forgiveness. Jesus wasn't popular because he was giving away free money. Jesus was giving away something far more valuable. Free forgiveness. Full forgiveness. Forgiveness for all your sins. Forgiveness only Jesus gives. The same word of God that those people heard we are hearing today, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." Who wouldn't crowd around to hear that? Who wouldn't want to come early and stay late? Who wouldn't want to be right up front to hear that first hand? They were crowding around listening to the Word of God. First they were caught. Then they could fish for others.

When Jesus finished speaking, something amazing happened. It started with the word of Jesus. Let's remember that. Fishing for people starts with the Word of God, the word of Jesus. Jesus says to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Now, not being a fisherman, I thought, "So what?" Well, studying more, there was everything wrong with this advice. This was not the right place. It was easier to catch fish in the shallow water, not the deep. It was not the right time. People fished at night when the fish swam to the top of the water, out of the cooler depths. And Jesus was the son of a carpenter, not a life-long fisherman like Simon and James and John. And how many professional fisherman were standing on the shore and hear this advice from this armchair carpenter. What did he know about fishing? And these guys, experienced, professionals, working on their home turf, the one lake they had fished for life, they had fished all night and caught nothing. So these words were nonsense. Wrong place. Wrong time. From the wrong person. Simon would have looked silly to follow this advice.

Simon's pretty honest. We've worked hard all night. It's been labor. It's been a struggle. It's been wearying. It was all night long. And we haven't caught anything! Nothing! Not even Forrest's Gump four shrimp that make half a cocktail. Nothing! Why would he listen? Why would he obey? Why would he bother? Because you say so. Because you say so. It made no sense. Peter would look silly in front of his friends and this huge crowd. But because you say so. And I know those words are a joke, and all the dads are laughing with delight. "Because I say so," is reason enough? Why? Because I

say so! And yeah, for children, because dad says so is reason enough. And yeah, for children of God, because God says so is reason enough. Simon called Jesus, "Master," the powerful one, the one with authority, the one who has the right to give orders. Because he says so is reason enough.

I know the word of God, "Fish for people." Seems silly. No one goes to church anymore, especially young people. Well, God says so. Fish for people. It's finally not about getting people in church, it's about bringing people to Christ. I know you look foolish in front of the crowd. But Jesus says so. How foolish will you look when you and your friend stand in heaven with Jesus? And you told your friend God's Word, because Jesus said so? I know it seems like the wrong time. People are spiritual, not religious. But maybe they've never seen a religious person who has a peace and joy they don't. Fish for people, because God says so. I know it seems like the wrong place. We are just a few miles from the center of the organization of freedom from religion. But we aren't trying to fill people with religion. We want to fill people with God's love, with his forgiveness. Take Bible 101. See how often we use the words, "religion," or, "church." See how often we use the words, "Jesus," and, "love." Yeah, it's hard work. Fish for people, because Jesus says so.

And did you see what happened, when Peter put let down the nets into the deep water, just because Jesus said so? They caught such a large number, such a great multitude, two boats began to sink. Not just one boat had a few fish. Both boats, had so many fish, they both began to sink. Even in Forrest's Gump great days, the boats didn't sink. But both boats, began to sink. The fish had really jumped right into the boat. The Lord is never stingy. He gives generously, without finding fault.

But Simon Peter found plenty of fault with himself. Peter fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord: I am a sinful man!" What? Go away from me? Why not, "Be close to me Lord, I want to catch some more fish"? Why not, "Be close to me, Lord, I am a sinful man and I need your forgiveness"? Maybe Peter had doubts they would catch any fish. And every single fish was another reminder of his sinful doubts. Maybe every little flip and flop of the fish was a shot to the heart, reminding Peter of his grudging obedience, doing this only because, "Jesus said I have to."

But there's a deeper reason. The closer Peter got to Jesus' holiness, the more Peter realized his own sin. When Isaiah saw the Lord, Isaiah didn't jump and down for joy. Isaiah said, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" When Peter saw this catch of fish, saw the power of the one who brought this catch, Peter's eyes didn't flash with dollar signs. Peter's eyes flashed with guilt. Peter saw his sins, all the more clearly.

You see, sin confuses us. Sin makes us say the opposite of what might seem obvious. It seems so obvious to want to be close to the one who can catch so many fish. But sin confuses us. It might seem obvious that we, sinful people, would want to be close to Jesus, the holy person, but sin confuses us. Jesus is going to make us aware of our sin before he brings his forgiveness. And maybe we don't want to be aware of our sin at all and in the great irony, sin keeps us from the one, the only One, who gives full and free and final and finished and forever forgiveness. Don't run from Jesus because of your sin. Run to Jesus because of your sin. Don't say, "Go away from me, Jesus, I'm a sinful person." Say, "Come to me, Jesus, I'm a sinful person."

Jesus didn't push away sinful Simon. Jesus spoke the angelic words, "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid. 365 times, these words occur in the Bible, depending maybe on the translation you are using. Don't be afraid. Every day. Don't be afraid. Your sins are forgiven. Don't be afraid. I will always love you. Don't be afraid. I always want you close to me. Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people." You aren't going to catch dead things for death. You are going to catch living people, for eternal life. You get to speak the angelic words, "Don't be afraid." It's been almost 2000 years since God sent angels from heaven. Now, God sends people from earth. God is sending you to the single mother who feels alone. To the married couple who both feel alone. God is sending you to your coworkers who talk big, but are really just hiding insecurity over their sins. God is sending you to the friend who says, "The church would collapse on me if I ever showed up." And you can't say, "Don't be afraid. I still can't figure out why it doesn't collapse on me either, sinful as I am." There's a simple opportunity coming up. Bible 101. Invite your friend. Come along with them. Invite your coworker. Give them a ride. Show you need God's Word as much as anyone. Invite to Bible 101. It's a simple way to fish for people. This part of God's Word is one amazement after another. Amazing crowds that crowd Jesus into the lake to listen to God's Word. Amazing command that defied all odds. Amazing catch that astonished these companions. Amazing

confession of sin. Amazing comfort of forgiveness. There's one final amazement. They pulled their boats on shore, left everything, and followed him. Left everything? This great catch of fish? They left the winning lottery ticket on the shore? They left everything? Fisherman was not a bad occupation. Middle class at least, maybe upper middle class. James and John had hired men. Peter had a nice house. But they left everything. To fish for people. They left homes and money and spent less time with their families. They left the catch of a lifetime on the shore. They left everything. Because every day following Jesus was winning the lottery. Leaving everything for Jesus was having everything. I'll be honest. I've been wrestling with this for several weeks now. Leaving everything to follow Jesus. Do I have to leave behind an awesome congregation I love serving, to travel the country helping more churches fish for more people? Do I have to leave behind a great opportunity to travel the country and help more churches fish for more people? Do I have to spend less time with my family to follow Jesus to Texas and Florida and Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin to help more churches fish for more people? Will I have to leave a great opportunity on the shore for someone else to pick up and enjoy? What will you have to leave behind to follow Jesus and fish for people? Your comfort? Will you have to leave your awkwardness at the door to invite a friend to Bible 101? Will you have to give up your Thursday night to come along, to crowd around and listen to God's Word? It might seem wrong place, wrong time, wrong way, but Jesus says so, "Fish for people." Jesus can fill up both our boats, because he says so. Jesus can literally make the fish jump into the boat, jump on the pier, because he says so. Amen.

From now on, you will be fishing for people. Amen.