

Luke 5:1-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

Do you know any good fish stories? How big was that one that got away? Fishermen are notorious for exaggerating. Some people think that's what Luke is doing here. They think that this miracle of Jesus wasn't a miracle at all, that it was just a fish story, an exaggeration made up by Peter and his fishing buddies, James and John. But, if we believe that the Bible is God's word, and we do, then this is no fish story. This was a miracle, the proportion of which caused these experienced fishermen to stand in awe and amazement. They had never imagined catching so many fish at one time that two boats were filled to overflowing and almost ready to sink from the weight of all the fish; not to mention that they were caught at the most unlikely of times, during the middle of the day!

This was indeed a miraculous catch of fish, but, this morning we aren't going to focus our attention so much on the miracle as the reaction that Peter had and what Jesus said to him. Jesus told Peter, "Don't Be Afraid."

Peter had witnessed at least one other miracle of Jesus, and maybe more. He had been with Jesus at the wedding of Cana where Jesus performed his first public miracle, changing water into wine. But, for some reason, this miracle of Jesus had a more profound effect on Peter than the one at Cana did. It really hit home this time that he was standing in the presence of the holy, sinless Son of God.

Maybe it made a greater impression on him because this miracle had to do with his livelihood. How could it be that Jesus, a carpenter, could say "Let down your nets" and have them be immediately filled with fish? Did he just know that there were all kinds of fish at that spot at that moment, or did he cause them to be there? If he knew they were there it showed his omniscience. If he caused them to be there it showed his omnipotence. Either way Peter recognized that Jesus was more than a carpenter, more than a fishing buddy.

Witnessing this miracle caused him to reconsider the way he had spoken to Jesus earlier, kind of questioning the wisdom of casting his nets in the middle of the day. Although he had done what Jesus asked, he certainly had doubted that it would be successful. Now he realized that Jesus knew his thoughts, there was nothing hidden from Jesus. That made him feel guilty. Jesus knew even his secret sins. And, if Jesus had the power to do miracles, imagine what he could do to punish him for his sins. The power and presence of Jesus filled Peter with fear as his sins flashed before his eyes and he realized what should happen to him because of his sins.

Maybe you have had a similar experience. Maybe there has been a time in your life when the presence of God was suddenly very evident; maybe you were rescued from danger, or maybe you experienced an obvious answer to prayer. Maybe there was something that happened in your life that suddenly made you realize that God is not some unconcerned being millions of miles away, but he is near you, right next to you, involved in everything that happens in your life. You were very thankful for your rescue; or for the answer to your prayer; but it also suddenly hit you that Jesus is always standing right next to you, as close as Jesus was to Peter. He knows everything you are doing. In fact, since he is God, he even knows everything you are thinking. None of your sins are hidden from his sight. Maybe, like Peter, you were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and fear as you realized what should happen to you because of your sins, that God should punish you for all eternity in the fires of Hell.

God wants us to feel this fear, the fear that Peter felt when he realized he was in the presence of the holy and sinless Son of God, the fear that Isaiah felt when God called him to be his prophet. He wants us to recognize our sinfulness and to understand what we deserve because of our sins,

not because he is mean and likes to see us cower in fear before him; but so that we will appreciate what he has done for us in Jesus. He wants to say to us what he said to Peter, **don't be afraid.**

Notice that when Peter told Jesus to go away from him because he was afraid that Jesus would punish him for his sins, Jesus didn't go anywhere. It's as if Jesus were saying, "Peter, if I were going to punish you for your sins I would have done it a long time ago. Don't be afraid. I have not come to punish you but to save you." That's what Jesus told Nicodemus. **God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.**

When we are overwhelmed by the realization of our sinfulness and by what we deserve because of our sins, Jesus says the same thing to us that he did to Peter. He tells us, **don't be afraid.** Don't be afraid that I am going to punish you. I didn't come to punish you; I came to save you.

Jesus' miracles remind us that he is the Son of God. He is just the Savior we need. He is the only one who was able to do what God demands of us. He was able to take our place under the law and to keep it perfectly, satisfying God's demand for righteousness. And God has credited Jesus' perfect righteousness to us. He was able to take our place under God's wrath. He was our lightning rod, absorbing the full wrath of God and shunting it safely away from us.

Jesus said to Peter and he says to each of us, "don't be afraid." It's good. It's necessary for you to realize your sinfulness and be filled with the fear of eternal punishment; but don't be afraid. I have not come to punish you. I have come to save you.

There was something else that might have been causing Peter some fear. Remember what Jesus said next? **Don't be afraid Peter, from now on you will catch men.**

Consider how that might have been a frightening statement for Peter. Consider what that meant. It meant a career change for Peter. He had been a fisherman all his life. It was his lively hood. It's what he knew and was comfortable doing. And Jesus wanted him to change careers, do something he knew nothing about? And what about his family and the families of James and John, his business partners? If they all left the business to follow Jesus, how would all those people be supported? How much did "catching men" pay?

Don't be afraid, Peter. If you are worried about the physical needs of your family, look at what I just did. In just a moment, almost at the snap of my fingers I provided you with two boat loads full of fish; more fish than you ever imagined catching at one time. Don't be afraid to leave your fishing business and follow me. I can and will provide for your needs. I can and will give you and your families daily bread.

Don't be afraid Peter. I know you don't have a clue about how to catch men. Come with me, I will teach you how by word and by example. I will provide you with the training and the tools and everything you need.

At this point I can't help but think of the day of Pentecost, three years after Peter, James and John left their boats and followed Jesus. On that day we hear Peter boldly preaching to the huge crowds that had gathered around them. We hear him telling the crowds, "God sent you the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and you crucified him. But God raised him from the dead, just as Scripture had foretold." When they feel the same way he did when he saw Jesus provide the great catch of fish; when they are cut to the heart by the realization of their sins, he calls on them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. And did he ever catch men that day! We are told that 3000 believed and were baptized on that day.

Don't be afraid Peter, from now on you will catch men. Jesus was true to his word.

You may not be called by Jesus to catch men as an apostle or as a full time public minister, but if you are a Christian, and since you are here today, I believe you are, you are called by Jesus to

be a witness. You are called by Jesus, as Peter wrote in one of his Epistles, to **always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for hope that you have**, and to do so with gentleness and respect. If you are a Christian, Jesus has called you to live your life, not for yourself, but for him, the one who died for you and was raised again. He has called you to do everything you do, your job, your homework, your sports, even what you do in your spare time or on vacation, to do everything you do to the best of your ability and in a way that brings honor and glory to him.

Don't be afraid, Jesus says to you and to me. Don't be afraid when your sins flash before your eyes and you are filled with fear because you realize that all you deserve from God is eternal punishment in Hell. Don't be afraid, Jesus says, because I came into the world not to use my almighty power to punish you, but I came into the world to save you. Don't be afraid, Jesus says to you and to me. Don't be afraid to be my witnesses in everything you say and do. Don't be afraid because I can and will be there to help you, to give you boldness and even to give you the words to speak, words you have learned by studying the Scriptures.

Jesus said to Peter, and he says to you and to me, "Don't be afraid." Amen