



LESSONS

ISAIAH 6:1-8 [9-13]

PSALM 138 (2)

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

ST. LUKE 5:1-11

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

**MOST HOLY GOD,
THE EARTH IS FILLED
WITH YOUR GLORY,
AND BEFORE YOU
ANGELS AND SAINTS
STAND IN AWE.**

**ENLARGE OUR VISION
TO SEE YOUR POWER**

**AT WORK IN THE
WORLD, AND BY YOUR
GRACE MAKE US
HERALDS OF YOUR
SON, JESUS CHRIST,
OUR SAVIOR AND
LORD. AMEN.**

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Liturgical Day: The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Date: February 7, 2010
Sermon Title: Focused, Hard-working, Determined

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning's Gospel lesson contains a great fishing story. I love a great fishing story. I've heard a few, and I've lived a few, and I've told a few. Some of my fishing stories are even true! Most great fishing stories are classified as such because of an extraordinary catch of fish, or because of the companionship shared between those who are fishing, or because of the spectacular scenery that surrounds the experience. The great fishing story in this morning's Gospel lesson includes its share of these attributes. But this story is great not because it's about fish, but because it's about our central purpose as Christians.

It is a familiar story. It comes up at worship every three years, and is a favorite of Sunday School teachers. Most of you could probably tell it, without even using your Bibles. It takes place early on during the ministry of Jesus. He is teaching a great crowd at the Lake of Gennesaret, and as the crowd presses in on him, he decides to board a small fishing boat -- the one belonging to Simon. They go out a few feet, so Jesus can teach the people from the boat. Simon and his friends are there because they have just spent a long night in the boats. They have fished for hours, and have come up empty. As they reach the shore, the last thought in their minds is to go back out and start fishing again. They just want to get the nets cleaned and mended, so they can go to their homes and get some rest.

That is not to be, though. When Jesus finishes teaching the people, he turns to Simon and his friends, and directs them to put out a little further and drop the nets again. Simon resists at first. After all, he has fished all night long when the fishing was best on that lake. They haven't caught a thing at the best time of day, and now Jesus wants them to put out their nets when every fish in the lake can see the nets from 500 yards away. Yet at the word of Jesus, Simon goes against his better judgment, and lets the nets down again. Much to his surprise, they gather in so many fish that the nets are beginning to break.

Simon immediately realizes that he is in the presence of the sacred. He drops to his knees in front of Jesus, expresses his feelings of unworthiness, and asks Jesus to go away from him. Jesus will have nothing to do that that, though. Instead, he does the exact opposite. He invites Simon into his inner circle, and declares that from this time on, Simon will be catching people with Jesus.

The very first words of instruction that the disciples receive from Jesus in the Gospel according to St. Luke, is that they are to leave their occupations as professional fishermen, and begin to fish for people instead. "I will make you fishers of men," we used to sing. This is the first word to the disciples in St. Luke, and it will become the focus of their efforts for some time to come. They will begin to fish for people -- they will begin to draw others into the kingdom of God that

they are just now beginning to experience for themselves.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

This is a surprising move for those first century fishermen. A central concern of the Jewish faith has been, for years, the effort to separate themselves from unbelievers. Their cleanliness laws, their dietary laws, their regulations regarding who they can eat with, talk with, and shake hands with... all of these laws seek to establish a clean line of division between faithful Jews and outsiders. Yet Jesus, in recruiting his followers, gives to them this first directive: that they will work with him to catch people -- to draw people into the kingdom of God -- to begin including those whom the law has, for years, sought to exclude. It is a dramatic first task to assign to these disciples, and as we know now, a hint of what is to come. Jesus will draw God's people into an entirely new direction -- and their faith will never be the same.

It may have seemed surprising to them, but of course it isn't for us. The first half of our Mission Statement reminds us that we are "Welcomed into God's love," and called to help others discover that they too are "Welcomed into God's love." We understand that our purpose is to invite others into the grace of God that we have received. And the image provided for us this morning is that of these first century fishermen on the lake of Gennesaret. What we embrace as a central purpose, the disciples are just starting to glimpse, here at the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel. But how do we do that?

Before we go too far down that road, we need to think a bit about the image of the fishing net. I certainly don't want to be found to be questioning Jesus' judgment, but I suspect that this particular image may not be the most helpful one he ever came up with. The fishing net is a fairly violent image, actually. It suggests that we bring people into the kingdom of God by force, and against their will. Moving ahead with that understanding, the church has erred in some very unfortunate ways over the years.

But perhaps it is not so much the image of the net that Jesus has in mind, as the image of the fishermen. We think of these hard-working, determined fishermen. With a single-minded focus, they work through the night, fighting off the rolling seas, cold breezes, and backbreaking labor of throwing the nets out and drawing them in over and over and over again. They are dedicated men. They have learned to use every gift and ability at their disposal to succeed as a fisherman. And they are confident that if they persist, they will be rewarded for their efforts.

This may be better encouragement for us today than anything else in this story. What would it look like for today's Christian to be just as focused, just as hardworking, just as determined? And to draw it a bit closer, what would it look like if the members of this congregation were just as focused, just as hard-working, and just as determined?

I say that because we have our Annual Congregation Meeting this afternoon, following the late service. During that meeting, we'll try to take a reading on how well we did this past year in pursuing our mission as a Christian congregation. We'll elect some new leaders, and approve some of the initial plans we have laid for this coming year. Those of you who are members of Saint Peter are asked to be part of this meeting. (Those of you who are guests are invited to join us as well, and I encourage you to do so: it will give you a good idea of what we are all about as a congregation.) We need you to know what we are trying to accomplish. We need your support. We need your participation.

This could be a great year for us. We just sent an invitation to three dozen families whom we consider to be prospective members of this congregation. We are about to kick off an exterior remodeling project that will completely transform our front yard, and make a much stronger impression on those who are passing by. We're hopeful that the relatively good financial report published by the government this past week is a sign of what's to come. I am certain that this is going to be a great year for us.

But we need each of you to make it a priority in your lives. We need each of you to engage in the work of this congregation with the focus, the work-ethic and the determination of a first century fisherman. We need each of you to discover what gifts and abilities God has given to you, and how you

can put them to use for God through this congregation. We need each you to do what you can to strengthen the life of this congregation, and its ability to welcome others into the grace of God. If that happens – when that happens – I have no doubt that this is going to be a great year for us. I have no doubt that God will accomplish a great deal through us.

Like those fishermen, Jesus calls us to use our gifts and abilities, and to give our very best, to continue this ministry of fishing for people: this ministry of understanding that we are all welcomed into God's love, just as we are. It is a message that has given our lives hope and stability. It is a message that could mean so much to others, who don't yet share our faith. Today Jesus calls us to fish for people – let us be faithful in the attempt.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

English Text: ⁱ

^{5.1} Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ 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. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ 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. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. ⁱⁱ

Greek Text:

^{5.1} Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ τὸν ὄχλον ἐπικεῖσθαι αὐτῷ καὶ ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ἐστῶς παρὰ τὴν λίμνην Γεννησαρέτ ²καὶ εἶδεν δύο πλοῖα ἐστῶτα παρὰ τὴν λίμνην· οἱ δὲ ἄλιεῖς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀποβάντες ἔπλυνον τὰ δίκτυα. ³Ἐμβὰς δὲ εἰς ἐν τῶν πλοίων, ὃ ἦν Σίμωνος, ἠρώτησεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐπαναγαγεῖν ὀλίγον· καθίσας δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου ἐδίδασκεν τοὺς ὄχλους. ⁴Ὡς δὲ ἐπαύσατο λαλῶν, εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Σίμωνα· ἐπανάγαγε εἰς τὸ βάθος καὶ χαλάσατε τὰ δίκτυα ὑμῶν εἰς ἄγραν. ⁵καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς Σίμων εἶπεν· ἐπιστάτα, δι' ὅλης νυκτὸς κοπιάσαντες οὐδὲν ἐλάβομεν· ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ ῥήματι σου χαλάσω τὰ δίκτυα. ⁶καὶ τοῦτο ποιήσαντες συνέκλεισαν πλῆθος ἰχθύων πολὺ, διερρήσσετο δὲ τὰ δίκτυα αὐτῶν. ⁷καὶ κατένευσαν τοῖς μετόχοις ἐν τῷ ἐτέρῳ πλοίῳ τοῦ ἐλθόντος συλλαβέσθαι αὐτοῖς· καὶ ἦλθον καὶ ἔπλησαν ἀμφότερα τὰ πλοῖα ὥστε βυθίζεσθαι αὐτά. ⁸Ἰδὼν δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος προσέπεσεν τοῖς γόνασιν Ἰησοῦ λέγων· ἔξελθε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἁμαρτωλὸς εἰμι, κύριε. ⁹θάμβος γὰρ περιέσχευ αὐτὸν καὶ πάντας τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἄγρα τῶν ἰχθύων ὧν συνέλαβον, ¹⁰ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην υἱοὺς Ζεβεδαίου, οἳ ἦσαν κοινωνοὶ τῷ Σίμωνι. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Σίμωνα ὁ Ἰησοῦς· μὴ φοβοῦ· ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀνθρώπους ἔση ζωγρῶν. ¹¹καὶ καταγαγόντες τὰ πλοῖα ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἀφέντες πάντα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/worship/church_year.

ⁱⁱ St. Luke 5:1-11, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke 5:1-11, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).