



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity:

Fishing for People

St. Luke 5:1-11

Fr. William Klock

July 9, 2023

Jesus had a big message, he was alone. He knew the amazing and miraculous circumstance of his birth. He knew the words that had been spoken over him as a baby, when he was too small to understand, blessings given by old saints like Simeon and Anna when Mary and Joseph had taken him to be dedicated in the temple. Most of all, he knew the scriptures. He'd pieced it all together and he knew who he was and why his Father—not Joseph, but his *Father* father had sent him. Jesus knew what the God of Israel was doing through him. Jesus knew what he had to do. If he'd had any doubts about it, his baptism by John in the Jordan had driven them all away. John knew who he was. And then the heavens had opened, the Spirit had descended on him, and his Father had spoken: "You are my son." And he had proved himself in the desert as he was tempted by the devil—each time that knowledge of who he was, what he was here for, and all those scriptures he'd memorised and meditated on came flooding back. He resisted the devil and the devil had fled. And his Father had vindicated him, sending his angels to minister to him. Walking out of the desert, Jesus was ready to take that big message to his people. And he began, literally, with his people. He went back to his home town of Nazareth and on the sabbath, in the synagogue, the rabbi gave him the Isaiah scroll to read.

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
[Jesus read out]
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.**

**He has sent me to proclaim liberty
to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are
oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favor."** (Luke 4:18-19)

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus said. Today it begins. Israel had been crying out to the Lord for deliverance for centuries. He has heard your cries and he has sent me to proclaim the good news. Deliverance and judgement are coming. Judgement always comes with deliverance, because the faithful cannot be delivered unless the unfaithful and the wicked are judged and cast down. So repent and believe for the kingdom of God is near.

At first the people—many his friends and family—were amazed, but all they wanted was their own personal Messiah to work miracles for them. By the time Jesus had finished rebuking them, they'd formed a mob and chased him to the edge of a cliff. They were ready to throw him down, to kill him. By some miracle he escaped. He fled to Capernaum. There, people listened. He cast out a demon. Word about him quickly spread. One sabbath, after preaching his message in the synagogue, that message about the coming kingdom, about deliverance and judgment and the need for Israel to repent, he was invited to the home of a man named Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was sick and had a fever. Jesus healed her. Pretty soon everyone in town with a problem was crowding Simon's house to be healed by Jesus. In him they were getting a glimpse of the age to come, of the world finally set to rights. They didn't want him to leave, but he had to go, he had to take the good news about the coming of the kingdom to the rest of God's people, to the rest of Judea. Judgement was coming for Israel, and the people—everyone in Israel—needed to hear Jesus' call to repentance.

So many villages and town and cities. So many people. So many heard and were enthusiastic. Many even believed. But so many didn't. Some just saw the miracles and their only thought was for today and they missed what the good news really was. Some got it, they heard Jesus' announcement of the kingdom, but they misunderstood or they got angry. The Messiah was supposed to announce judgement on Israel's enemies, not on Israel! No matter how Jesus looked at it, his mission was so big and he was just one man. It weighed heavily on him. A big message and even bigger task for just one person.

But one day not long after, St. Luke tells us in today's Gospel, Jesus was standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. He was preaching. It was a good spot for that. There are coves that amplify the sound. He was using one of them like a natural amphitheatre. But the crowd of people just kept getting bigger and bigger. People wanted to see the miracle-worker, but more than that, they wanted to hear the good news he was proclaiming—that in him the Lord had heard the cries of his people and had come to deliver and to judge. Some—the hurting and the poor—needed to hear that message of consolation. Some wanted to know just who it was that would be judged—because they'd heard Jesus calling people to repentance. And the crowd got bigger and bigger and people were struggling to hear what he was saying.

And Luke writes that there were a couple of boats on the beach. Fishing boats. The fisherman had come in from their night's labour, had emptied the boats, and were on the beach looking after their nets while Jesus preached. Jesus recognised one of the fishermen. It was Simon. A few days before he'd been invited to his house and he'd healed his mother-in-law. And so he called to Simon and asked him to row him out onto the water so that he could preach from his boat and let the water and walls of the cove

amplify his voice. Simon did as Jesus asked.

And Jesus preached about the Lord's kingdom that was so soon to come. Luke doesn't give us Jesus' specific words on this occasion, but we know he preached there what he preached everywhere else. He preached about coming judgement, he preached about repentance, and he preached about the life of the age to come that awaited the repentant on the other side of that judgement. In Jesus the Lord had come to set things to rights, but to be part of that new world and that new and restored people, the people of Israel needed to be right with the Lord. For those who refused to repent, war with Rome waited and the death and utter destruction it would bring. To make his point Jesus spoke of outer darkness and gnashing teeth—just the sort of judgement language the old prophets had used—Gehenna and unquenchable fire. Jesus reminded the people of familiar passages from the prophets, from Isaiah and from Ezekiel and from Jeremiah, passages about judgement and deliverance and national repentance, *and* about the faithfulness of the Lord.

And in the middle of all that, inspiration struck Jesus. He had an idea. The good news wasn't going to proclaim itself to Israel and there were only so many places and people Jesus could reach with the message in the short time he had. He needed helpers. He needed disciples. And I can't help but think that a little bit of Jeremiah was running around his head—I'll come back to Jeremiah in a bit. He may have just preached this little bit of Jeremiah to crowd, and as the great crowd finally dispersed and he was alone in the boat with the fishermen, he asked Simon to row out into deeper water and to cast his nets for a catch. Jeremiah echoing in his mind the whole time.

Simon liked Jesus. After hearing his preaching, he'd invited him to his home. But you can hear the

annoyance in his voice when he responds to Jesus, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." If the fish weren't there in the dark, they certainly wouldn't be there in the day. And they'd just cleaned the nets. And they were tired. What was the point? But Simon knew. If it was anyone else, he'd have pushed him overboard, but this was Jesus. He'd seen Jesus do things. And, anyway, he owed him one. So Simon and his friends rowed out into the deep water and cast their net. And to their surprise, they caught something. They caught a lot of somethings—and it wasn't old boots and hubcaps! Simon started yelling to haul in the nets before they broke from all the fish teeming inside. But the nets started tearing anyway. Sooo many fish! Simon was calling to James and John in the other boat, "Get over here! Quick! Help, before the nets are destroyed and all these fish get away." And pretty soon they were hauling and scooping fish into both boats. But now it was the boats that were in danger. There were so many fish that the boats were riding dangerously low. The waves were washing over the sides and the boats were sitting lower and lower in the water by the minute. The fishermen started bailing frantically.

But not Simon. Luke tells us that Simon Peter—yes, *that* Simon—he tells us that Simon Peter fell down on his knees in the middle of the sinking boat and wriggling fish and cried out to Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Simon Peter had an encounter with the holy. He was no great theologian. He knew nothing of homoousioses or hypostatic unions. He simply knew Israel's scriptures and in Jesus he saw the faithfulness of the God of Israel revealed brighter than the sun at noon. He knew that in Jesus the Lord had come to his people and Simon Peter did what everyone who has ever had an encounter with the God of Israel has done: He fell to his knees, confessed his sinfulness, and pled for that holiness that felt like it

was burning into his sinful heart like a red hot poker, he pled for it to go away and leave him be. Luke makes a point of telling us this detail of the story, because it points back so obviously to Isaiah's encounter with the Lord. Do you remember Isaiah's response to the presence of the holiness of God? Isaiah cried out:

"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)

Isaiah couldn't bear the presence of the holy either. And that's when an angel flew down to Isaiah bearing a burning coal from the altar. He touched Isaiah's unclean lips with the coal and proclaimed that his guilt had departed and his sin blotted out. And then, when the Lord called out, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Who will proclaim my message to Israel?" Isaiah responded with those familiar words, "Here I am! Send me!"

And it's that scene all over again in that sinking fishing boat between Simon Peter and Jesus. As Simon Peter knelt, shaking in the presence of the holy, Jesus announced to him, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." In Matthew and Mark, Jesus says to Simon Peter and his friends, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." These were the men Jesus needed to help him to proclaim the coming kingdom and to call the nation to repentance in anticipation of it.

But what, exactly, was Jesus calling Simon Peter to do? On the one hand it's obvious. We've all been singing the song since we were in Sunday School. *I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men. I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.* And if you're like me, of course you think of evangelism. And we forget that Simon Peter and his friends fished with nets and we

imagine ourselves doing evangelism as if we're fishermen casting out a line with a worm on the hook and sitting and waiting for a bite. And that last little bit about "if you follow me"—*if*. There was no "if" in that sinking boat. Jesus just *told* Simon Peter, "From now on you'll be catching men."

When the Lord calls you, Brothers and Sisters, there's no if. Not for Abraham, not for Moses, not for Isaiah, not for Simon Peter—not for us. They all cowered in fear and then they squirmed and they even argued "I'm not worthy", "I don't know how", "I can't", but the Lord purified them, absolved them, equipped them, and sent them and they went. Every one of them. Not just Simon Peter that day, but James and John. But, again, what was Jesus calling them to do? What was he calling them for?

Remember I said that I think Jesus had a bit of Jeremiah running around his head when he told Simon Peter to row out into the deep water and to cast his nets. And I think that was the case because, first, Jesus was always preaching the prophets, and second, because of the context—he was in a fishing boat with fisherman.

In Jeremiah 16 we read the Lord's words of warning to Israel. The prophet was to announce the Lord's coming judgement on the nation and people of Israel. Here's what he says in Jeremiah 16:10-13. This is the indictment.

"And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them: 'Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his

stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.'

Some of the specifics of the sins had changed since the days of Jeremiah, but Israel in Jesus' day was just as unfaithful to the Lord. This was a perfect passage for Jesus to draw on in order to explain his ministry and why the Lord had sent him. The Lord had judged Israel then and he was about to do it again and for the same reason. Jump down a few verses to 16-18. Because they have not been faithful to his covenant, the Lord is going to remove his people from the promised land and send them into exile. And he's going to be thorough about it. He uses the imagery of fishing and hunting.

"Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations."

Jeremiah's point was that none would escape the coming judgement. When Babylon fell on Judea like a ton of bricks, many would flee, but none would escape the Lord's judgement. Like fishers casting their nets across the rivers and catching everything, the Babylonians would let no one escape. Everyone would be carried off into exile.

And this wasn't some bit of Old Testament prophetic imagery that the

Jewish people had forgotten. It's used in the Thanksgiving Psalms found at Qumran, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The singer of the psalm sees himself as a fisherman with his net spread over Israel, ready to catch the children of injustice and to bring them to judgement.¹ That's why I expect Jesus would have preached on this passage from Jeremiah, if not this day, then on some other. But what better passage to be preaching as he stood in Simon's fishing boat.

And something clicks in Jesus' head. This time there's a way to escape the coming judgement. That's why Jesus was sent. Not just to announce that judgement was coming soon, but to call the people to repentance—and even to give his life as a sacrifice for their sins. To make a new people, forgiven and full of God's own Spirit, who would be ready to live the life of the age to come, who would be ready to live in God's world set to rights, to live his law of love, and to take up their original vocation, to be his stewards and the priests of his temple. As Jesus says in John's Gospel, "God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." What Israel needs is fisherman, just like in Jeremiah's day, but not fisherman to catch the fish for judgement. Israel needs a corps of gospel fishermen who will catch people that they might live. The word Jesus uses for catch means to capture something alive. In the Old Testament it was used to describe capturing an enemy, while sparing his life instead of putting him to death. It's the perfect image for the mission of Jesus and his disciples. In the face of coming judgement, these gospel fishermen will catch men and women so that their lives will be spared.

I doubt Simon Peter or James or John had any idea that day the full extent of what they were in for, but they had heard the good news, they had chosen their side, and Luke writes that when

¹ 1QH^a 13:7-11

they'd got their boats and nets and the fish to shore, they left it all and followed Jesus. Like Isaiah, Simon Peter had heard the call, had been absolved and equipped by the Lord, and was ready to stand and say, "Here I am. Send me!" These disciples were the labourers sent out in to the harvest. Jesus gave them authority to preach and to heal and to cast out demons. They went out in the name of Jesus to prepare Israel for the judgement to come. Like Jesus, they announced the Lord's coming judgement on Israel for her unfaithfulness, and they called the people to repentance. There was life in a renewed people of God on the other side of the coming disaster, a life full of the Spirit, a life as the people Israel had always been called to be—the people who lived with God in their midst. And that ministry drew a line down the middle of Israel. There were those who heard this good news and believed. There were those who rejected the message. The disciples were to leave such people—to symbolically shake the dust from their feet and to move on and to carry the message to those who would receive it.

This is why Jesus told them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). Judgement would one day come to the gentiles, too, but before the Lord could judge the gentile nations, he had to judge and to renew his own people—to set his own house in order. Seeing the Lord do that, seeing the Lord come in judgement on his own rebellious people, and seeing him, through Jesus, establishing a new people, that's what would pique the interest of the gentiles. Seeing the faithfulness of the God of Israel—something they'd never seen in their own gods—that is what ultimately prompts the gentile nations to come and glorify this God who was unlike any other. This was the good news that would eventually

conquer the world of the Greeks and Romans for Jesus the Messiah.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, it's our turn. We're here this morning reading Luke's Gospel because the Lord has kept his promises. Because he kept his promise to discipline his own children and, through Jesus, to put his own house in order. Because he kept his promise to pour out his Spirit on that new people who found their identity in Jesus. Because he kept his promise to Simon Peter, that he would, from then on, be catching people instead of fish. Because the Lord was faithful and may in Israel believed. Because the Lord was faithful, the gentiles saw and believed. This God and his crucified and risen Son, and this Spirit-filled people were unlike anything the world had ever seen or heard of and so the world came, a trickle at first, but then nations and eventually an entire empire, to kneel before him and to give him glory. And the amazing thing is that through their faith in Jesus, they became part of this new Israel, this people of God, forgiven by his Son and filled with his Spirit. And ever since, this good news about Jesus and about his cross and about his resurrection from the dead and about his ascension to his heavenly throne and about the faithfulness of the God of Israel has been spreading—gospel fishermen casting their nets and catching fish—catching them that they might hear and believe and repent and know the life of the age to come. Because the Lord will one day judge all the earth, just as he judged Israel, and just as he judged the Greek and Romans. When Jesus has put every last enemy under his feet—and if the Lord's past record is worth anything, we know Jesus surely will put every last enemy under his feet—when the gospel and the church and the Spirit have done their work—and if the story of Simon Peter and this Spirit-filled church is worth anything, we know it will one day do the work Jesus equipped it to do—then the Lord will finally wipe every last bit of rebellion and sin and wickedness

from his creation. There will be outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth, but there will also be life in this world set to rights. Brothers and Sisters, Jesus sends us out to proclaim this good news, to prepare the world for what lies ahead, to preach the death and resurrection of Jesus, to proclaim like royal heralds that he is Lord, and that forgiveness and healing and life with God are his gift, that all who repent and believe can be part of this amazing, life-filled people he has created in Jesus, but that to receive that gift of his grace, we must repent and believe that we might be transformed—aligned with the values of his kingdom, that we might be prepared for the age to come and life with him. Today we're the gospel fishermen sent out to cast our nets, to proclaim the good news for the glory of God.

Let's pray: Father, you have called us and made us your people. You send us out, like Simon Peter, to fish for people that they might know the life of your kingdom. When we're tempted to protest, thinking that we are unworthy of the task, that we are too sinful, that we aren't up to it, remind us that in Jesus you have forgiven us, that you have made us holy, that you have filled us with your Spirit, and that you have given us this remarkable and irresistible story to tell the world, this story of your goodness, your love, your grace, your mercy, and your faithfulness. Give us the grace to do the work of your kingdom as we trust in your faithfulness to us and to all who hear it. Through the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.