

Luke 5:1-11

Feb. 6, 2022

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

So, let me start off by asking you a question.

Do you think Peter, Andrew, James, and John were meant to be Jesus' disciples or were they just in the right place at the right time?

I wonder about that.

Yes, Peter did already know Jesus, because Jesus had just healed his mother-in-law of her fever, but did Jesus seek out Peter's boat that day or was Peter just there when Jesus needed him, and his boat?

What do you think?

Well, you of course know the Lutheran answer to any either or question. It is yes.

Yes. Yes, Peter was called and yes, he was available. And then, he was also willing, even though he was afraid.

It seems that willingness may play a huge factor in who Jesus calls to follow God's will. Mary said yes, although Zechariah just laughed, but Elizabeth seemed willing. Hmm.

Anyway, back to Peter and the gang. A lot of times we like to put the disciples up on a pedestal, as if they are special human beings, but Peter, from the very beginning, makes it clear that they are not. As he says himself – he's just a sinner not deserving of anything but punishment.

He cries to Jesus – “Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man!” But, Jesus doesn't seem care very much. Jesus doesn't care about Peter's past or his reluctance, because Jesus knows that with him, Peter has a future – a future of catching people!

And as the old saying goes – it takes one to know one. So, I suppose it also takes a sinner to catch a sinner, right? Seems like that's why Jesus needs Peter and the boys, because Jesus is not a sinner. Jesus is the one who forgives sinners and brings them back to God.

So, Jesus takes Peter just as he is – he and the rest of them. Jesus doesn't change Peter into something he is not. Jesus doesn't say to Peter – now you are a tax collector – just as he doesn't call Matthew and tell him – now you are a fisherman. No, Jesus takes us as we are with the gifts we already have, and then he invites us to use those gifts in a new way for the sake of the kingdom of God.

In the Lutheran church, we call that our vocation. We are already gifted with passions and talents, and Jesus invites us to use them for the Kingdom of God, for the well-being of others, for the proclamation of God's love to and for the whole world. That's our vocation, not our 9-5 job, but who we are 24/7.

And I love that in Luke Jesus doesn't say – you will fish for people. Jesus says – you will be catching people! You will be catching people! Even before he's started, Jesus already guarantees Peter his success, because it's not really Peter's work, it's God's work, and God can use anyone – even Peter, even me, even you. We just need not let fear get in the way.

“Do not be afraid.” It appears in the Bible 365 times – one for every day of the year. Don't be afraid, because God is with you, not against you.

Your sins are forgiven so that you can live the Kingdom of God here and now – the Kingdom of grace and mercy, the Kingdom of love – not for your own benefit, because it's already yours, but for the benefit of all.

Now, we all know that it's scary to love unconditionally. We live in a world of earning and deserving. Unconditional love goes against what we've been conditioned to believe is true. That's the world, not God's Kingdom.

And, what if we are rejected? What if we are laughed at? What if we are taken advantage of? What if we are not loved in return? What if...

Well. Here's the thing with the “what ifs.” When we get worried about the “what ifs” we are looking at things backwards. It's not about us and what we will receive. It's about God and what we have already received!

Peter and Andrew were exhausted when Jesus showed up. They had worked really hard all night long to no avail. And then Jesus jumps in their boat.

After he teaches the crowds for a while, he sends Peter and Andrew back out into the deep water to fish some more. Even though they would have preferred to go to bed, they go out and drop their net, and then Jesus gives them more than they could have ever imagined, and it was easy. It wasn't hard work at all. Well, pulling in the nets was heavy, but the catching part wasn't. Their nets overflow and they have to bring in others to help. That's the Church.

When we follow Jesus into the deep waters, where we are way over our heads and can't see the bottom, or the fish for that matter, that's when we are in God's Kingdom, totally dependent on God and God's will, and that's where the fish are waiting. Because, it's not about us. It's always about God.

And it's scary. It's a scary place to be, because we are not in control and we doubt our own ability and worth, but it's not about us. It's about God and God's will.

And, if we are willing to let go, God will use us to feed the world with the good news, to catch all people up in the good news of God's peace in Christ, the good news of unconditional love, the good news of sins forgiven, the good news of there not being anything to fear, because there is nothing to earn or lose.

And so the fishermen drop everything and follow Jesus. They must have wondered, what else on earth will this guy do?! I've got to see it! And they go and they follow along to see what else might happen, and after three years of following, the most amazing things happens.

Their leader is killed as an outlaw, and is resurrected on the third day! Killed and resurrected! Killed as one outside of the law, who is resurrected because he is fully the Kingdom of God.

Sin and death do not have the final say! Love does! Life does! So, what is there to fear? Nothing! And with that, they go and catch people into the kingdom.

Do not be afraid! The resurrection is already here! Nothing can kill God's Kingdom. Other kingdoms will come and go, just as Rome fell, but the Kingdom of God has no end! It is eternal, and we get to live it here and now when we are willing and bold enough to not let fear hold us back.

Peter knew himself to be a sinful man, but Jesus knew him as a beloved child of God. Peter knew himself to be a fisherman and Jesus knew he would be catching people up in the net of the good news of God's love for all people, because he wasn't special. He was a sinful man.

The cool thing about nets is that they are non-discriminatory. Nets aren't judgmental. Nets catch everything from an old tin can, to sucker fish, to tilapia. Nets don't care. So, we are cast out into the world as God's net to catch up all people into the peace of unconditional love.

And unconditional love really makes a difference in the world. So many people act out because they feel unloved and unworthy of any form of love, but Jesus proclaims to all people – you are to die for.

You! You are absolutely to die for! That's how much you are loved!

And so Jesus dies for us, and on the third day is risen from the dead to continue God's work of proclaiming that there is no end to God's love for the world. And then the Holy Spirit is sent to keep us unafraid and lead us out into the world with the good news.

And it is good news, not good history.

Every day the world needs to hear about God's great love. And so we are sent, just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John to catch people up in God's loving embrace – Jesus arms are wide open on the cross. Arms wide open to embrace all people without any judgment.

With our arms wide open and our hands held together, we continue Jesus' work. Forgiven and forgiving, we are the net, intertwined with one another by God's love, and cast out into the world to catch all people up in a new way of being where love rules, and fear is dissolved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.