

Luke 5:1-11

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WE NEED NOT FEAR, BECAUSE JESUS WILL NOT DEPART FROM US.

“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”...And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed him.”

Let us pray: These are your words, Holy Father. Sanctify us by Your Truth. Your Word is Truth. *Amen.*

What exactly was Peter afraid of? Before his boat began to sink, Peter’s behavior was good and right. What was there to fear? He was good. Just how good was he? Peter saw a crowd of people following Jesus along the lake where Peter and his fishing partners had just finished fishing. They were done fishing, but not done working. Yet, still, Peter stopped cleaning his nets and stopped working to hear Jesus preach. This was good. Then he even lent Jesus his boat to use as a pulpit. In this way, Peter helped ensure that all the multitude which followed Jesus could also hear Jesus preach. This Peter did, because it was important that all could both see and hear Jesus. This, too, was good. Next we hear of Peter’s obedience to the Word of Jesus, even as this obedience required him to deny his own experience and reason. As far as it concerned his experience and reason as a veteraned fisherman, Peter knew that it was a bad day for fishing. Afterall, they had toiled all night and caught nothing. Still, he did as Jesus told him to. Peter said to Jesus, **“nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”** What great faith! This was very good.

And so Peter serves as a good example for us Christians today. Really, Peter’s behavior in this passage describes the entire Christian life.

First, we Christians stop what we're doing. We purposefully make time every week for attending church. We don't skip church to work or play sports or camp or do something else. No, we purposefully hear God's Word and by no means do we avoid it. We also purposefully make time every single day for reading our Bible and for prayer. This is just what Christians do! As much as our bodies need food and exercise, much more do our souls need spiritual food and spiritual exercise. This spiritual food is God's Word and this exercise is prayer. Thus, we rejoice to read and to listen to God's Word. And we pray in church and in our homes. We stop working, and we simply listen to Jesus.

Second, we give what we can and do what we can to make sure that we will always have a preacher and a church. We give both our time and our money to ensure that our church has what it absolutely needs: a pulpit with a pastor in it. Peter gave Jesus a boat for preaching; we give our pastor a pulpit. You, right now, are sitting in what is called the nave of the church. "Nave" comes from the latin word meaning "ship" or "boat." This word is where we get the word "navy." In fact, if you look up, the ceiling looks like you could just as easily be looking down at the ribs of a huge boat. This was clearly a purposeful architectural design. Because Jesus preached from a boat. And so we give the preacher a place at the very front of our modest boat here, where we can all see and hear him. This is because we need to see and hear our pastor. And we Christians need him to preach God's Word to us.

And to make sure that we always have this, we give our time and our money. We Christians listen to the words of our pastor who teaches the very same doctrine that Jesus teaches us in the Scriptures. Though we see a sinful man in robes in the pulpit and at the altar, though our experience and reason tells us that a mere man cannot give us what we truly need, yet still, we trust in the promise of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

And which promise is this exactly? Jesus, yes, true man yet also true God, has promised to send out fishers of men. And what do these fishers of men do? They preach God's Word, so foreign to our sinful world. A net is given to these fishers of men by Christ. This net is the Gospel. This net is what catches us sinners and pulls us

out of our self-absorbed, sinful existence, and into a life of repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus promises to send these men equipped with His saving Gospel. This promise is as sure as any of the rest of His promises. We see a man, a pastor. This is our experience and reason. But we know that from him, from our pastor, from our fisher of men, we hear the Gospel of our Lord. So we believe the Gospel of Jesus even when it seems to contradict our experience and reason. And we respect our pastor, speak well of him, and defend him. God, after all, has sent him to us.

But this, of course, is not the end of our passage. Nor does this describe your entire life as a Christian. Peter doesn't simply go to church, provide for his preacher, and trust in Jesus' Word unquestioningly. No, there's more. And there's more for you, too. Peter was afraid. For Peter, there was a deep, dark reality. A reality which weighed down his conscience more than the fish could possibly weigh down the boat which was now sinking beneath his feet. Yes, in a moment, Peter's boat became too crowded. But not on account of the fish. No, it was the Son of God in his midst which caused Peter suddenly to tremble. It was too much for him to handle. Peter knew that no man could see God's face and live. But right there in his boat, Peter was looking God in the face. In Jesus, Peter saw holiness and power. In himself, Peter saw sin and unworthiness. And he was terrified! Nothing could keep Peter from falling at the knees of his Lord and calling out in fear and desperation: **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"**

You know what Peter was going through, don't you? You've experienced it, too. The feeling of darkness and death working its way into your conscience and tormenting your Christian heart for being so weak. It is the weight of sin itself on your conscience. But it's more than the knowledge that you have sinned. It's that God knows, that He sees your sin. And it's the knowledge that He hates your sin and wants you to stop sinning. Oh, how you want this very same thing but cannot do it!

Perhaps you, like Peter, amidst shame, embarrassment, frustration, or just plain fear have thought it better that the Holy One, the One Who has purchased and won you from sin, death, and the power of the devil with His holy precious blood on

the cross—that it would be better that this One should depart from you rather than to remain with you and thereby destroy you. Ah, but no. No, you hear what Jesus has to say in response to Peter’s desperate cry. Peter, who was on the brink of despair, staring down both death and the harsh reality of his sin. Jesus tells Peter, “**Do not be afraid.**”

Perhaps you haven’t been as good as Peter. Perhaps you’ve made a habit of skipping church. Perhaps you’ve considered something, anything, more important than hearing the Word of God. Perhaps you’ve neglected your duty to support your church through your prayers as well as financially. Both of which are as important as the other. Perhaps you’ve trusted in your reason and experience more than the promises of God. Perhaps this reason and experience has told you that this life of pain and suffering cannot possibly be God’s will. Or perhaps you have been tempted to despair altogether and think that a loving God could not and should not love you, a miserable sinner.

Well, perhaps—no, certainly—Peter was a poor, miserable sinner just like you. But when you recognize your sin, your guilt, and you confess that you are not worthy to bear the name ‘Christian,’ this brings you to the One whose name you do bear. Yes, this conviction and confession of your helplessness brings you to your God’s knees, to Christ’s knees, in terror. But your God by no means wants you to stay there. In a moment, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your God and Lord, your Savior, lifts you up from your knees and comforts you with such words time and time again: “**Do not be afraid,**” says Jesus.

“But Lord,” you may say, “I am afraid of my sin. It is too great for me to bear.” “Do not be afraid,” says Jesus. “I know just how great your sin is. And I have taken it upon Myself. I have taken the sin of every sinner upon Myself. If you *have* despised the hearing of My Word, if you *have* been convicted of your sin of withholding your money from My Bride, the Church, if you *have* faltered in your prayers, if you *have* trusted in your experience or reason above Me, turn away from your sin and look at me and listen to me. Fear not: I have not taken My Word away from you. No, I have not, and now hear it preached. Yes, hear the sweet Gospel: Your sins are forgiven.

Your death I have died. Your pain I have suffered. Your debt I have paid. Your guilt I have removed. I have done this with my bloodshed on the cross for you, which now washes you clean, dear child. Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. My grace is sufficient for you. Come unto Me.”

“Lord, but I cannot,” you may respond. “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in You or come to You. I don’t know how, Lord. I am afraid.”

And so speaks your Jesus to you, dear Christian. “Yes, dear child. I know. But do not be afraid. I am with you. My Holy Spirit dwells in you. I have baptized you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid. Abide in My word, which I give to you freely, where you will find forgiveness, life, and salvation. No, do not be afraid. I have sent a fisher of men, your pastor, My servant, to guide you and teach you in the Way of Truth. He is sent to comfort you with the Truth. Do not be afraid. Rather, take eat. This is My body. Take drink, this is My blood. Do not be afraid. You are Mine. No one can snatch you away. In faith, you receive Me and My salvation and My holiness. *I am* worthy. And My worthiness makes you worthy. Do not be afraid.”

Jesus chose Peter and the other fishermen the day of that great catch of fish. Peter was, over time, *made* into a fisher of men by Jesus. Peter had to learn, though, with Jesus as his Teacher. And so he forsook all and followed Jesus. Nothing came before Jesus. Peter followed Him for three years, learning from Him, and receiving correction and admonition from Him. And in the moment of Christ’s greatest need on earth, Peter, educated and trained by Christ Himself, Peter failed Him. He denied Christ three times. Christ was crucified. Peter wept. Peter had departed from Jesus.

But then this, the darkest moment a Christian can possibly fathom—a denial of the faith followed by a dead Jesus—this was then followed by the resurrection of Jesus. Can you imagine the fear and anticipation that Peter must have felt at the sight of the resurrected Jesus? What was Jesus to say or do to him, Peter, the one who denied Him just days earlier?

Peter’s first encounter with Jesus tells us precisely how Jesus responds to fearful, penitent, sinners. Jesus says, “**Do not be afraid.**”

And Jesus does it again on Easter morning saying, “Peace to you.” Which is just another way of saying, “Do not be afraid.” Once again, Peter and those with him forsook all and followed Jesus. Even after Jesus ascended and apparently had departed, these men did not fear. No, they waited for Jesus to come how He promised them He would come. They trusted His promise, even though it clashed with their experience and reason. This is what they did and this is what we do. We, too, today, see Him come exactly how He has promised to come to us: in His Word and Sacrament. And in His grace, He has even given you a fisher of men to faithfully serve you as Christ so fervently desires you to be served. All you penitent sinners who are afraid, gladly hear the Word of Jesus today and always. It calls you to trust, despite your experience and reason, that your sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. Yes, your sins are forgiven. You have nothing to fear. You have Jesus. And He will not depart from you.

In His name.

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