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The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany February 6, 2022

Messengers Uncovered

The least qualified are the first sent

We might anticipate that the Son of God would continue to send angels to be his messengers as he did at Christmas. Instead, he sends human beings. Often these human messengers seem to lack both the talent and the faith to proclaim the good news. But Jesus calls them to himself. He cleanses them of sin and moves them with this love. They jump at the opportunity to be the ones through whom God does the same for others.

Luke 5:1-11

The Biggest Miracle Wasn't the Fish.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Imagine that you are Peter. You just worked a long, hard night doing the job that you have known your whole life: fishing. You know where to catch fish and when and usually you're right. Last night, though, not so much. It was a bust. So, you and your business partners pull the boats ashore and start cleaning the seaweed and algae off the nets. This isn't fun work, especially since you have nothing to show for all your hard work the night before. And then you hear a familiar voice. It's your friend, Jesus. You know this Jesus of Nazareth. You have been following him for a while and have seen and heard some pretty incredible things. He even healed your mother from a very severe illness. You were so tired from the work that you almost missed the crowd standing around him by the shore, but now that Jesus has your attention, you see them. "Man, that's a bigger crowd than he usually has around him," you think to yourself. Well, he would like to use your boat so that he can talk to the crowd for a while and you figure, why not? At least you can do something useful today. As you listen to him, you are amazed and mesmerized. He tells about the kingdom of God and you almost forget how tired your muscles are, how exhausted you were feeling as the sun came up this morning.

Then, Jesus turns to you and tells you to throw your nets in the water. Now, if you were Peter, how would you react? Jesus was a carpenter, not a fisherman. That was your profession. You could have told him that it wasn't the right

time of day or the right place. But that isn't what you say. You say, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Because you say so. What a declaration of trust in Jesus! Well, the trust pays off. You haul in so many fish that the boat starts to tip, and the nets start to rip. You call the other boat to try and help haul in this massive catch and that boat starts to sink, too! In all your years fishing, you have never seen a catch like this, never. Especially during the day, especially on this lake. You are shocked and you try to wrestle in your mind what is happening as you wrestle the nets bursting with fish onto the shore.

Then it hits you. This man Jesus, he healed your mother. He turned water into wine. He speaks the very words of God with the authority of the prophets from of old. Maybe you're too tired, maybe you haven't quite figured out who Jesus is entirely, but this Jesus just performed a miracle for your benefit, and you start to wonder: why me? You know the sinfulness of your heart and you know that you have not kept God's law. This is a miracle; this is power and holiness from God himself in front of you from Jesus. You get down on your knees and beg Jesus to just go away from you. Not as an insult, but out of fear. Humans always fear when they see even a glimpse of holiness and Jesus is the most holy. The faith that trusted Jesus on the water, that trust is shaken to its core when it comes down to seeing a miracle in front of your very eyes and recognizing just how unworthy you are.

But Jesus doesn't go away. He doesn't even get angry at the suggestion that he go away. He says something that is so full of grace that you can't even understand it yet. Jesus tells you, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." He doesn't tell you that you're perfect. He doesn't tell you that you've got what it takes. He just chose you.

Peter goes with him. What more could he do? It is Peter who realizes and confesses about Jesus, "To whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." Jesus chose him, not because of who Peter was, but because of who Jesus is: his loving Savior.

You and I, we're not Peter. We don't fish in the lake of Gennesaret in Israel. We don't get to see Jesus miraculously heal our loved ones from crippling illness. We don't get to take Jesus out on our boats. That just isn't our reality. But there is one thing that makes us very like Peter: our sinfulness. The moment that Peter realized he was standing before a holy man, he recognized his own sinfulness. We are just as sinful as Peter because we share the sin that Adam passed down to each one of us and which we have and will continue to pass on to our children. Sure, Peter could have thought of any number of sins just like you and I could certainly go on and on making a long list of the sinful things we have thought, said, and done. But those all come from the corrupted, sinful nature that we inherited. No matter how good we are, no matter how hard we try, we will never put off that old, sinful state of existence which will eventually take us to our graves. We ought to say with Peter, "Go away from us Lord!" because we know just how sinful we are.

Jesus' words for you and me are the same as the words that he had for Peter: Do not be afraid. And here is the miracle that is bigger than any catch of fish could ever be: We only know some of our sins, Jesus knows them all! And yet, in spite of that sinfulness that we each have, Jesus went to the cross anyway. The one who knew your sin perfectly wanted to make you perfect and so he did. All of this is wrapped up in that little command: Don't be afraid. Jesus has taken away all of the sin that drags us down. The sin that makes us feel unworthy of Jesus, that makes us feel like telling Jesus to leave sinners like us behind. He put the sin behind us instead. His plan of salvation was perfect. He made you perfect in God's sight. We might be able to still see that sinful nature come up, but God doesn't. Not when he sees the sacrifice of Christ. He has purged the guilt from your ledger. You have nothing to fear.

Even though Jesus hasn't necessarily called you to be fishers of men, he still has a task for you. He didn't save you just so that he could save you, he set you free from the burden of sin so that you could live to serve him. What is it that God has called you to be? Fathers and mothers. Brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters. Employees and employers. Students and teachers. He loved you enough to look beyond your shortcoming and he carved out a place for you to serve him, right here and right now. I don't think Peter ever imagined when he grew up that he would drag his boat ashore and just give up the career that he knew to follow a man who was destined to be hung on a cross. But he did just that. When Jesus told him to not fear, he didn't. And you and I don't have to fear either. We don't have to fear

moving forward in the callings that God has set up for us to do because our salvation is already bought and paid for, because the call to live for Christ doesn't come because of us, but because of him.

Remember the miracle that is bigger than fish: Christ set you free from the burden of your sinfulness and from the fear of not being enough. Go and live in the joy of God's calling to be his child, to be his servant in this world. Amen.