

**Luke 5:1-11**

Have you ever told someone to get lost! To leave you alone and stop bothering you! We probably all have at some time. And if you have ever been on the receiving end of these words, you know how much they can hurt. Peter used words like these one day after he had been out fishing. What may surprise us is that he said them to Jesus. “Depart from me, Lord,” he said, Get out of here...I don’t want you around!

Now those are not nice things to say to anyone, but to Jesus? We need Him. We love Him. We’ll tell Satan to “get lost!” Jesus we want around. Now there’s a reason why Peter said what he said. There’s a reason why he told the Lord to leave him alone. It wasn’t a good reason, but it was a reason.

Peter had been fishing all night. So had James and John. All three were experienced fishermen. They made their living off of catching fish. They were good at it. But that night they caught nothing. It wasn’t because they didn’t try—the fish simply were not “biting” so to speak. They didn’t use poles and hooks, but they had dragged their nets through the waters and the fish simply were not there. So at daybreak they gave up. It was time to clean their nets of the debris and algae and wait for the next night. Hopefully then the fish would be active in the waters.

But then Jesus, after teaching the people, tells Peter, “Let’s go fishing. Let down your nets in the deep water.” Well now, Peter certainly had respect for the Lord, but Jesus was no fisherman. The best time for catching fish was already past. And besides, where was Jesus all night? Sleeping? How could He have known that Peter and his companions had fished those waters all night long? There were no fish there—this they were convinced of.

And so Peter speaks these words to Jesus: “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” He felt it was fruitless—letting down the nets again. But because Jesus said to do it, they did. And when they did they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. And even with two boats hauling them in, the boats began to sink. It was the biggest catch of the year! The decade! Maybe ever!

How would you have felt? Overjoyed at all the fish you caught? Peter felt ashamed, embarrassed, miserable, for he had doubted the word and command of Jesus. And so from his mouth came these words, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Do you ever read things behind what people say? I see something behind Peter’s words. What he said was, “Leave me alone, Jesus.” What he meant was, “You wouldn’t want to be around me, would you Jesus?” Peter assumed that Jesus didn’t want anything to do with him. After all, Peter was a lousy sinner, and he had just demonstrated his disobedience and worthlessness. Why would Christ want to be with Peter?

Have you ever felt that way? I have. When we do lousy things; when we feel ashamed, we just want to go off and be by ourselves. When a child has been disciplined he may start to sulk and pout, and it doesn’t help for brother or sister to offer comfort. “Leave me alone!” the child says, “Just go away!”

What is one of the most vital things a person needs when going through a tough time, such as a marriage problem or an alcohol problem? Love...encouragement...companionship. What's the last thing a person will usually accept when going through a tough time? Love...encouragement...companionship. "I just want to be alone. I don't want to talk about it." We all say it.

It's a sad thing, but how true it is, that at the very time in our life when we need to be in God's Word, and in His House, and at His Table, we pull away and withdraw from the presence of our Lord. This is true not just here, but all over—the pastor is usually one of the last to find out about a problem in a marriage and in a home, when he really should be one of the first. But we are like Peter. We tuck ourselves inside our shells and withdraw from others—and we also withdraw from our Lord.

The one thing Peter needed more than anything else was Jesus—His love, His forgiveness, His acceptance. And that's precisely why Jesus ignored Peter's request. What a horrible prayer that was..."depart from me, Lord!" What a wonderful thing that Jesus answered, "No." "No, Peter, I will not leave you. I will not forsake you, for you need Me. Fear not, Peter, for from now on you will be catching men." Peter needed the Gospel of forgiveness. Jesus is that very Gospel. Peter needed Jesus, and that's who He got.

You and I need Jesus. We need Him when life is easy. We need Him when life is tough. We need Him when we want to wallow in self-pity. We need Him when we are ashamed of our sinful actions. And as Jesus would not leave Peter, neither will He leave you. He comes to you in His Word of Grace. He comes to you now. He comes to forgive you in His Holy Sacrament. And He does forgive you. He is never ashamed of you. He took your shame upon Himself. He will never reject you, for He who was rejected for you on the cross, has become one with you in the waters of your baptism. How can the head reject its body? Just so, Christ our Divine Head cannot reject you, His body, His bride—the Church for which He died.

Now in calming Peter's fears; in refusing to leave this poor sinner alone with his shame, Jesus gives him an unusual invitation. "From now on Peter," He said, "You will be catching men." As Jesus forgave Peter, so Peter would now work hard at bringing others into the presence of that same forgiveness. Peter used to drag fish into a boat. Now he would throw out the net of Christ's Gospel, and through it, God would drag sinners into the safety of Christ's boat, the Church.

And since you and I receive from Jesus the very same forgiveness Peter received, then you and I also have the same invitation to proclaim His love for sinners; to be "fishers of men." But you know, perhaps in this way we're a little like Peter as well. Jesus says, "Let out your nets and go fishing." "But I've lived in Augusta...Marthasville...Defiance... Washington...my whole life. I've known my relatives, friends, and neighbors for years. Jesus, I've been fishing in these waters for a long time. I've worked hard and caught nothing. The fish just aren't biting. There are no fish to be caught in my family, in my neighborhood."

We don't know where the fish will bite, but Jesus does. It's Jesus' net; it's Jesus' boat; it's Jesus' invitation. And He will bless our "fishing" as He sees fit to bless. That's why we can throw out the net of His Word. That's why we can invite that sinner for whom Christ

died to church and Sunday school with us. That's why we can include Jesus in our conversations among family and friends.

You have not been called to be an Apostle as Peter was, but you know the same Jesus he knew. The same Jesus made you His forgiven child in Holy Baptism. And you, like Peter, have been brought out of the darkness into the light of His mercy and grace—so now you and I have the same invitation to use the net of God's Word and go fishing.

And please understand clearly—Jesus' love for you is not based on how well you "fish." Jesus forgives you not because you bring others to church with you, but because He died for you. You are a Christian not because you throw out God's Word like a net into the waters, but because He made you His own in the waters of your baptism.

You are in Christ, dear baptized Christian, and therefore you don't live under the Law. You live in the forgiveness of Christ. To bring Jesus to others, and others to Jesus is not something that you have to do...it's what you, as God's child, are able to do for Christ Himself does it through you.

I don't normally speak of lottery tickets in church, but something happened last week which may help us see this more clearly. When that older couple from St. Louis won the jackpot—several hundred million dollars—they allowed their children to be a part of it. They shared their winnings with them. They didn't have to. They wanted to. They wanted them to share in their joy.

If you have any joy in Christ Jesus. If you have known His love. If you have been comforted by His forgiveness. If you believe heaven is yours freely in Him—that is the reason why you and I want our loved ones to know Christ as we know Him. When you walk out that door this morning, you walk out a forgiven child of God having received your Savior here today. If you bring someone with you next Sunday then God has blessed your "fishing" this week. But whether you come with someone or by yourself, nothing changes in how God feels toward you. He loves you. He forgives you. He gives you heaven in Jesus Christ. These things are not changed by our "fishing." But through our "fishing," others, even our loved ones, may be given the same blessings that God has given us in Christ Jesus. Amen.