

Luke 5:1-11

When you have a tooth which has decayed and is causing you constant pain, you go to the dentist. And would it not be rather ridiculous, even the height of insanity, after he has seated you in the chair and told you to open your mouth, for you to tell him, "Stay away from me; leave me alone!" The same would be true of a cancer patient telling his doctor, "Don't touch me!" Or a dying sinner telling his pastor, "Don't say anything; just let me be; go away!"

We might, therefore, also call Simon Peter insane after seeing what he did in Luke chapter 5. He royally put his foot into his mouth. "You're no fisherman, Jesus," is what he in essence said, "So who do you think you are telling me how to fish!" But as soon as they let down their nets in the deep water, as Jesus had told him to do, they caught perhaps the biggest catch of fish of the entire decade! So many fish that they were causing two boats to sink.

How would you have felt at that time? Peter was ashamed. He was embarrassed for what he had told Jesus. He had doubted the Lord, and Peter was proven wrong. "Depart from me," he cried at Jesus' knees, "For I am a sinful man!"

Have you ever felt like Peter? Have you ever done something (maybe just last week) that was so very wrong and later you were ashamed of what you did? If your answer to this is "No," then the church has nothing for you. You do not need the Sacrament on this altar. You have no need of the words of Absolution. You're the perfect man, woman, or child, and you could show the rest of us how to live.

The truth is that every day we say things and do things which are totally wrong and wicked. Like Peter, we doubt what God has said. We do not trust His promises completely. We do not want to do what He says we should do. And we justify our actions. Peter thought he knew more about fishing than Jesus did. That's our temptation...to think we know better how to run our life than God does.

But Peter was insane. Not for doubting Jesus. Not for crying, "I am a sinful man!" But for telling Jesus, "Depart from me!" "Go away!" "Just leave me alone!" Peter had terrible pain and Jesus could help him. Peter was full of the cancer of sin and Jesus could heal him. The one Man Peter needed; the one Man who could take away his guilt, his shame, and his sin was standing right in front of him, and yet Peter told Him, "Leave me alone...Depart from me!"

Do we do that? Do we sinners ever tell our Savior to get away from us? Yes, we do it all the time. When we have sinful intentions and want to carry them out, we want Jesus to just go away. When we could have our Bible open at home but leave it closed instead, we're telling Jesus, "Depart from me...go away!" When we could be in a Bible Class or Sunday School room but choose not to go, we're telling Jesus, "Depart from me!" When we could be in worship and at the Communion Table but stay away from our Savior's Words and Sacrament, we're telling Him, "Depart from me!"

Why do we do this? Here is why Peter said these words...he was ashamed of himself. God was holy and he was sinful. Why would Jesus want anything to do with him? Peter, in his own mind and heart was not worth forgiving. Perhaps he thought he was beyond forgiving. If you have ever had such thoughts, then take comfort. If you do not think much of yourself, look again at the cross upon which your Savior died. God shed His blood not just for every sinner out there; He shed His blood for you. He counted the cost of taking your shame, your guilt, your sin, and there was never any hesitation. You were worth dying for, and He did.

Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." But do we ever say, "Depart from me, for I am a good man?" "I'm doing fine without you, Lord. If I should ever need you, I know where to find you, but for now just let me alone to live my life. Depart from me." Had these been Peter's words, our story in Luke 5 would have been a sad story indeed. Jesus would have had no words of comfort for Peter. No forgiveness, no mercy, no "Do not fear; from now on you will be catching men." Had Peter told Jesus, "Depart from me," because he did not need Jesus, then Peter would have been, not a disciple, but a Pharisee; not a follower of Christ, but an enemy.

What about you? Why do you and I so often depart from Jesus? Why do we depart from His words of life? Why do we depart from where He comes to be for us with His grace and mercy? If it's because we have no need of Him; no need of His mercy; no need of His words of grace, then our story is a sad one. Then we are like the thief on the cross who perished. The other thief needed Jesus and he told Him so. "Lord, remember me!" But there were two thieves. The one needed Jesus. The other had no use for Him. Which one are you?

"Depart from me!" It would be good if these words never came from us. Never came from our lips. Never entered our thoughts. Never were spoken by how we act. Instead, the words, "Come to me, Jesus" ought always to be on our lips. "O God, be not far from me," is how our Introit says it. "Make haste, O God, to deliver me!"

But now look closely at our story in Luke 5. Did Jesus do what Peter asked? Did He depart from Peter? No, just the opposite. He held him close with words of comfort. "Do not fear, Peter, you are forgiven. I will not leave you. I am not ashamed to be your Savior. For you I will die. I love you."

Friend, you are here today because Jesus loves you just as He loved Peter. I don't care how poorly you have been living. It doesn't matter how far away you have been departing from your Lord and Savior. He has drawn you here today. He has brought you here to wrap you in His mercy; to forgive all your sins; to put His words of life in you; to give you salvation in His flesh and blood. No matter how ashamed you are of your past, Jesus is not ashamed of you. He takes your shame, your sinfulness, and in their place He gives you a crown of glory and a robe of holiness. In your baptism these are yours. And Jesus gives you this promise: "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." Do not be afraid. Jesus is not here to condemn you. He is here to forgive you, and He does.

Now if these words are words of joy for you; words which uplift you and heal you, then you too, with Peter, from now on will be catching men. Peter was a disciple and Jesus worked through Peter to draw sinners to His grace and mercy. Are there such sinners in your life? Loved ones, friends, co-workers who have departed from Jesus? Who have left His church? Or who have never known Christ as their Savior? Can you not throw out the net of God's grace to them? An invitation to come to church with you? An invitation to learn about their one and only Savior?

Yes, you can, as can I. For to be a disciple of Christ also means to be fishers of men. And who knows where the fish are at? Not us, but God knows. He can fill our church with so many hungry sinners who need Jesus that, as Peter needed help with all the fish he caught, we will need more pews, more hymnals, more offering plates, more parking spaces. Don't laugh. Peter did and the next thing he knew his boat was sinking with fish. Can that happen here? Yes, if God allows it. And if He does, it will happen through the proclaiming of His good news in Christ. It will happen as He works both in you and through you. Amen.