

Epip 5 2010 "Called and Sent"  
 Luke 5:1-11

New Testament scholar Tom Wright has this to say about fishing in the lake of Gennesaret - or the Sea of Galilee, as it is more commonly known:

*"Fishermen at the time of Jesus knew that fish are more likely to be caught after dark on the Sea of Galilee. Peter, James and John, partners in a fishing business had worked all night for nothing; the last thing they would normally do would be to start again by daylight."* (from [Proclaimsermons.com](http://Proclaimsermons.com), 2-7-2010)

Picture this: You are one of the crewmen on a fishing boat featured on T.V.'s "Deadliest Catch". If you've ever watched that program you know the kind of guys who work on those boats. Rough, tough, brave, some might say "crazy". You are at work, doing the work you have labored at, day in, day out, for many years. And along comes this itinerant preacher, and he tells you to do something that makes no sense in light of your years of experience.

What might your reaction be? Incredulity? Ridicule? A well chosen expletive? Well, that is not the reaction of Peter and the other fishermen. "We've fished all night and caught nothing, and years of experience fishing have taught us that nighttime's the best time for catching fish. Years of fishing these waters have taught us that you generally catch nothing during the day - but if you say so, "Master", we'll pull on out into the deep water and let down our nets ...." That word "Master" drips with cynicism bordering on derision. Peter has perhaps heard of the miracles of Jesus, healing the sick, turning water into wine. But this is fishing and his reply to Jesus may be a challenge as well. "Okay, wise guy. You think you are the "master" of everything. Let's see you do a miracle out in the deep water of this lake." Or perhaps he was thinking economically, "All right! This is my chance to use this miracle worker to make a quick buck."

And you know the rest of the story. They bagged a catch of fish that was so huge they had to call some other boats over to keep the nets from breaking. No doubt the fishermen asked, "Who *is* this guy?" And suddenly Peter sees Jesus in a different light. He realizes that Jesus is more than just an itinerant preacher, more than just a miracle worker. No this Jesus has the power of God! And so he says, **"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"** The name for Jesus on the lips of Peter has changed from "Master" to "Lord". And Jesus says, "Yes, I know you are a sinful man, but I have bigger fish for you to catch, Peter. You are coming with me! And from now on, you are going to be catching people!"

And Jesus is just as right about that as he was about the fish. He doesn't, in this case, even have to say "Follow me." Peter and the other fishermen bring their boats to the shore. And they leave everything - *everything*. They drop everything and follow Jesus. The fishermen have been caught by Jesus. (from [Proclaimsermons.com](http://Proclaimsermons.com), 2-7-2010)

Jesus called his disciples in the midst of everyday life events. He calls us in the same way. Peter, James and John were called as they tended to their business as fishermen. It is not so different for us today. Jesus calls us to follow Him and from the perspective of the world it makes no sense at all. Who is this Jesus? Why would anyone follow him? Yet down through the ages millions of people have done just that, follow. Up to this point the text speaks to us all. We too are called to faith and trust in Jesus. But then the question becomes, “are we all called to be “fishers of men” like Peter was? Many pastors (including me) have used this text to coax, cajole, scold or insist that we all are to become “fishers of men” like Peter, James and John. But is that your calling? I believe the answer is “yes” but there are different levels to that calling. We can answer that call in either the public or the private venue. A “public” response would mean going public in witness to others. A “personal” response would mean a faithful witness at home and with family and friends. I believe we are all called to this personal response and that this is the most important place for your witness. The public call is more specific and limited.

Luther said that one of the most important things to remember about interpreting the Bible is to determine if what the Bible says is spoken to you. Does the text speak to you in your situation in life, your life at this time? Jesus spoke to the crowds, but he didn’t call all of them to be disciples. He called Peter, James and John and 9 others to public ministry. So what is the difference?

We are all called to personal faith in Jesus. That call comes to us through the faithful witness of a parent, a friend, a relative, a pastor or Sunday School teacher. That call to faith comes to us as we read the Bible or other Christian literature. The Holy Spirit uses the witness of others to bring us to faith. We need only to hear a word of witness and the Holy Spirit takes it from there and does the miracle of creating faith.

The Bible says, “My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish that for which I send it and prosper in that which I intend.” (Is. 55:11).

That is how we come to faith. But now that you believe what will your witness be to others? Let me first say what it should NOT be. To be a witness is not to “sell the church” and its programs and activities. These things are by-products of our life together. Your witness, to be effective, is simply to point to Jesus by speaking his name, in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. You witness to others when you speak of your faith in a winsome fashion. It is Jesus whom we proclaim. When the church loses this focus, it starts “selling itself” rather than pointing to Jesus. When the church sells itself as “institution” for the improvement of the world it has very limited appeal. It may build up its institutional power to control but it loses its divine power to convert.

The key for Christians is to remember our mission. We are called to be faithful first, last and always. We grow our faith thru worship, study, and prayer. We are not here to entertain one another, to fiddle with the mechanics of a religious institution but to grow in faith. Worship, Sunday School, Bible studies, fellowship groups, etc. are opportunities for us to learn more about Jesus and what he has done for us. You come to church each week to hear again and again that you belong to God in Christ Jesus, that your sins are forgiven in Jesus and that the Spirit of God calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps you in faith. You need to hear that good news over and over again. This good news equips you to speak a word of winsome witness and it enables you to face the world with its troubles and temptations.

When it comes to sharing our faith our first priority is family. We want our children to know and love the Lord. We want our children to grow up in the faith until they “get it” and are able to stand on their own with their own strong, personal faith. As parents, you try to teach your children many things, how to get along with people, how to be responsible, to work hard etc. But the most important thing you can give your children is to pass on the Christian faith. How do you do that? It starts when they are young.

Example: I was out at our daughter’s house last week and as Jen and Frank put their kids in bed they said their evening prayers. It warmed my heart to hear our grandchildren saying the Lord’s Prayer with their parents and singing “Children of the Heavenly Father” as part of their bedtime routine. That’s how we begin passing on The Faith to our children. I believe that this is the primary calling of every Christian. Faith is shared with family first and foremost. We are all called to this primary ministry. I’m sure many of you have done this or are doing this already. God will bless your efforts. And as parents you should never stop praying for your children that God would hold them in faith. I do this every Sunday in worship when we have silent prayer. I suspect you do as well.

Our emphasis of “Faith @ Home” ministry is to equip parents to do this kind of ministry with their children. You can’t expect that just because you have faith that your children will “get it” without some intentionality on your part. Talking about your faith is key. Making it part of your home life is essential. Prayer, worship and encouraging attitudes shaped by Christian values are key to helping children grow in faith.

Now, perhaps this text speaks to your heart in a more expansive way calling you to reach out, beyond your family, to a wider sphere of friends and neighbors. The best way of doing this is to speak with personal conviction. We all enjoy talking about the things we love.... be that our hobbies, our children or grandchildren, our latest vacation, etc. Once we have trained ourselves in the language of faith and have confidence in what God has done for us in Christ, then our enthusiasm for telling others will grow. If your faith story comes from the heart you will find many opportunities to speak a word of witness.

Peter wrote in one of his letters, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (I Peter 2:9).

Faithful witness talks about what God has done for us not about what we are to do in the world. As Christians we are filled with the wonder of God’s grace and are eager to share that with others. Peter experienced this grace in Jesus and so he wrote, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (I Peter 3:15).

The church’s job is to point to Jesus. As St. Paul put it in the Epistle lesson for today... “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received; that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures...” (I Cor. 15:3-5)

It was **this** message that turned the world upside down. It was **this** message that galvanized the disciples and the early Christian community to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of men. It was **this** message that spread throughout the world, changing lives, delivering men and women from bondage, setting people free. It was **this** message that created the church and it is **this** message that we proclaim in **this** place each and every Sunday.

Peter, James and John were called to follow Jesus. This is our calling too. It begins at home and who knows where the Spirit of God will take it from there. What we do know is that God’s word, spoken by faithful disciples, will work the miracle of faith in those who hear. For this great promise and blessing we say, Thanks be to God! AMEN