

## **Luke 5:1-11**

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.\*

## **Go Away From Me** - February 6, 2022

*Luke 5:1-11*

We are gathered here this morning for many reasons. For some, this Sunday morning time is perhaps a break from your busy week. I hope that our worship time provides you an alternative, a real alternative to taking a break from the issues and challenges you are facing. For some, this Sunday morning time is an opportunity to return to the past, to gather with friends and family. We sing hymns, old and new, we offer prayers. The service follows a predictable order, order which may be lacking right now.

Still, for others, this hour may be for you a time to encounter God. Those of you who attend when we are in the sanctuary or sign on early in our zoom cast know that before we begin our service, I offer a prayer asking God to bless our service. I ask that the prayers, songs, scriptures, and sermon help to bring people closer to God in whatever way God chooses.

Getting closer to God. I would hope that for members of churches, that would be a desirable goal. I would hope that underlying the words we say and the closeness we experience in being with each other, we are somehow encountering God.

Of course, that assumes that we want to encounter God. Every human being on this planet has a idea about God, who God is, what God wants. Over time, organized religions have arisen in different parts of the world that assert their particular ideas about God and to bring groups of people together to share those ideas. We are familiar with several of the world's major religions. We may not know exactly what they stand for but even with the Christian community there are many differences over who we are and what we stand for.

Let's just say that most Christians, regardless of denomination, would say that there is a God who created the world and came to earth personally as a human being we call Jesus. We believe God wants human beings to have a personal relationship with God and that in the book we call the Bible, God has expressed God's plan for how the world should work and how we should relate to each other.

Now there are many ideas about God and the thing we call Spirituality, is a blanket term embracing all the ways humans believe they can be in touch with God. Those who are into astrology see God in the movements of the planets and stars. Some say they get spiritual energy from crystals. Others observe nature and see God's present in that. In short, many people sense an "otherness" which extends beyond our senses and they want to understand it, and, if possible, influence it.

What is astrology, for example, if not an attempt to discern God's presence and God's will by means of studying the movements of the created world? Fortune tellers claim they have some kind of personal contact with whatever is "out there" and can predict the future somehow. I can go on.

However, our Christian faith is centered on establishing and growing a personal, one-to-one relationship with God. This assertion can be both comforting and disturbing at the same time. On the one hand, it can be comforting to know that we are not alone in the world. No matter how apart we may feel at time, no matter how separated from others we may be, we are not in the universe all by ourselves. Undergirding our existence is a God who made us, loves us, and accepts us for who we are, no matter what we have done. Believing that God is truly with us can be a great source of comfort and strength especially when things aren't going the way we want them to.

On the other hand, to believe that God personally, intimately knows us can also be a disturbing, if not frightening thing. To God, our lives are completely open. Everything thought, every action, every thing we have done, good and bad to each other is known to God. Every action we have done to ourselves, is known to God. We cannot run, we cannot hide.

I think this total exposure, this total openness before God is a difficult idea to accept. I mean every day we are reminded how our supposedly private information on the internet is really not private. If you're like me, you've changed your credit card numbers several times because someone has obtained them. We know that anything we post on social media stays there forever, meaning one angry outburst, one mistaken comment can come back to bite us years later. We've all heard of people whose careers have been ruined because a Facebook post from years ago suddenly resurfaces for all the world to see.

So take our exposure on social media and expand it infinitely. That, friends, is what God knows about us. Every good thing you've done. Every nasty thing you've done. Every good word you've said. Every bad word you've said. Every good thought you've had. Every bad thought you've had. God knows.

In a way, such an idea is mind-blowing. For Christians and Jews for that matter, there is no such thing as privacy with God.

When you look at life that way, there are only two ways to react. The first is to acknowledge that our lives are indeed far from perfect, we are sinners, and our relationship with God is broken. The other way is to pretend that God does not know us and therefore do our best to ignore God and drive God away as much as we can.

Let's be honest with ourselves, when we look, really look at our lives, we know that there are not one, but many things we done, said, or thought that we are now ashamed of. There are hundreds of incidents over the years we wish we could walk back but we can't. Moreover, in addition to the many mistakes we know we have made, there are undoubtedly more, many more, that we don't know we have made.

I would say that in our modern age, internalizing and living with the idea of sin is likely the biggest stumbling block to following Jesus Christ. If you don't think of yourself as a sinner. If you don't believe you sin every day. If you don't believe you have a broken relationship with God, then you have no need for a savior to repair that relationship. You have, in short, no need for Jesus.

I mean, if you don't believe you're a sinner, why belong to a church? Why believe anything about Jesus except that he was a nice man with some impossible ideas about how the world should work? If we see ourselves as OK, then Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are essentially meaningless.

Peter, on the other hand felt quite the opposite. We don't know much about Peter's life before he met Jesus. We know he was a fisherman and his friends and partners were Andrew, John, and James. We know he lived in a village called Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. He was married.

However, Peter obviously knew a lot more about himself. He was Jewish. Attended synagogue. Was familiar with the scriptures and the Ten Commandments. Basically, he knew what his God expected of him. Moreover, in his own mind, he judged himself as falling well short of what his God wanted. For whatever reasons, Peter felt himself unworthy of God.

How do we know? In today's scripture Peter encounters Jesus and realizes that Jesus is far different from anyone he's ever met. Peter has heard Jesus speak. Jesus apparently healed Peter's mother-in-law. Now Jesus tells Peter to go out fishing after he's spent the night not catching anything and finds so many fish he boat can't hold it all. For Peter, he could only conclude that Jesus was no ordinary human being. Somehow Jesus was in relationship with God.

That realization, that Jesus had a special relationship with God, frightened Peter. He knew that Jesus could see right through him and knew everything about him and he was scared to death. Peter knew himself well enough that he was fully aware that he fell far short of what God expected him to be and so the last thing he wanted was to be anywhere near the presence of God. In his fear and his anguish all he could say to Jesus was, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man!"

How would you feel if you suddenly felt yourself in the presence of God? Would you welcome such an encounter or would you be overcome with fear and trembling. For Peter, he felt Jesus represented

every horrible thing Peter ever said, did, or thought. Jesus represented all the terrible things he was ashamed of. How else could he react? What else could he say. He was in the presence of God and far from feeling joyful or glad, he was fearful and ashamed.

But isn't that how most of the people whose stories we hear in scripture feel? Throughout the Bible, almost everyone God encounters reacts the exact same way: God encounters people, they react by realizing how sinful and unworthy they are. They all say no to God and whatever God wants.

Now some of us today, perhaps many of us, are not really concerned about the issue of sin, and certainly not their relationship with God. Such people have no need for Jesus because they feel their relationship with God, each other, and themselves is basically OK. Such people believe they have never or rarely done, said, or thought anything which cause hurt or harm to others. Such people simply don't care about a relationship with God, because they think they don't need one. They reject God because for them, God doesn't matter.

There are others, like Peter, who have judged themselves and found themselves guilty. They find themselves so guilty that they while they know God and believe in God, they can't possibly imagine a relationship with God. They also reject God because they feel God has already rejected them.

But what if there is a third way? What if we not only need, but want a relationship with God and furthermore, what if we believe we can have a positive relationship with God, no matter what has happened in the past?

How does Jesus respond to Peter? Does he remind Peter of every sinful thing he's ever done? No. Does he condemn Peter to his face? No. Does Jesus call Peter unworthy to be in relationship with him. No.

Instead Jesus says to Peter the same thing God has said to everyone who tells God to go away, even us. Jesus says the two simple words, "Fear Not." Yes, Fear Not.

Far from rejecting us, far from judging us, far from condemning us, all Jesus wants to do is love us, forgive us and launch or relaunch a relationship with us! That, friends, is the real good news! Fear not! God knows you, knows everything about you, and just wants to love you right now, just as you are. Somehow Peter heard the words, Fear Not, and his attitude and ideas about God changed completely. He was refreshed. He was renewed. Because of Jesus he became a new man. Is it any wonder that immediately he stopped what he was doing, threw down his nets, and followed?

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.