

## Luke 5:1-11

<sup>1-3</sup>Once when he was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.

<sup>4</sup>When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch."

<sup>5-7</sup>Simon said, "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets." It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.

<sup>8-10</sup>Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. "Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself." When they pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee's sons, coworkers with Simon.

<sup>10-11</sup>Jesus said to Simon, "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed him

### Jesus Invites Us to Follow Him

"Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness." For all Simon Peter's faults we certainly can admire his honesty. "I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness." Not everyone is able to make such a confession; a lot of folks, when standing in the presence of Jesus, would more likely say, "Listen, Jesus. I really appreciate all the fish you've helped us catch. How'd you like be part of the crew?" Imagine what a successful fishing business you'd have with Jesus your crew. You could make a good profit off of this character, and you could probably get by just giving him a 10%...maybe 20% cut of the profits – it is my boat after all.

Oh yes, there are lots of people who see Jesus as someone to exploit...not by using his fishing skills but by claiming authority "in Jesus' name." You may have read about a bishop in West Virginia who was living a pretty extravagant lifestyle. You have probably have heard of a few pastors whose net worth is in the tens of millions of dollars, even hundreds of millions. Jesus can bring in the money, and money can be used in ways that Jesus would approve of, but money can also bring temptation, temptation to tend to our own "needs" – like fancy cars and houses and clothing and expensive vacations rather than "needs" of a lot of other people, needs like food, medicine, shelter, safety, clean water, or clothing. So we should give Peter a lot of credit; he could see what was holy and respect it enough not to corrupt it. He could see the power of God at work in Jesus, and he didn't try to turn it into something that would personally benefit him.

And we should also give Peter credit for not turning a blind eye to his own faults. "Go away from me, Lord," Peter said. "I am a sinful man." I spoke about that last week, about our bad habit of noticing the faults in others better than we notice them in ourselves, or as Jesus put it, pointing out the specks in someone else's eye before we remove the plank in our own eye. It's much easier, and safer to our pride, to look for all the flaws in others. We feel so much superior to all those flawed people because we ourselves don't have those flaws, or so we think. We have an easy time finding flaws in the church as well; we see people who use the name of Jesus

to bring them personal wealth, and we can get very cynical. Instead of saying “Go away from me, Jesus. I’m a sinner and can’t handle your holiness,” we say, “Go away from me Jesus. Your Church is full of sinners who have corrupted your holiness.” And we have just given ourselves a perfect excuse to stop attending church. Peter was probably not much different than you or me in our tendency to find fault in others more easily than we find it in ourselves, but the person standing in front of him was Jesus, and it was probably pretty difficult to find any genuine flaws in him. Peter was at least honest enough not to fabricate flaws in Jesus, not to see something that was not really there. And so Peter noticed the contrast between himself and the One who stood before him.

And that is a very good thing. Last week I said that honesty is the first step we take on the path to spiritual wellness. Seeing ourselves for who we are, specks and logs and planks and all, is necessary if we really want to get better, because unless we can see what our illness is we don’t know how to cure it. Peter doesn’t mention any specifics about his own sinfulness, but he knows that sin is there. The problem is that he doesn’t know what medicine to take, and that is what I want to talk about this week. What is the cure for our sickness? Recognizing that there is something wrong is the first step. The second step is applying the fix. And I went into that last week as well, saying that the cure does not come from within ourselves; the cure comes from God, from a power outside ourselves, and we therefore must seek God for our healing. This brings me to today’s question: Now that we know we’re sick, what does the healing process look like? And I must tell you that it is a process. It’s not like an inoculation or some corrective surgery that you receive once and you’re healed for life. Healing is a lifelong process that involves Jesus, and walking with Jesus. That’s where we start today.

Peter is a man who has recognized his spiritual illness confessing, “Lord, I am a sinner.” But then he says to Jesus, “Go away from me, because I can’t handle all this holiness.” That seems strange. It’s like being sick with pneumonia, a doctor shows up at your door, and you say, “Please leave me; my house is a mess.” I think some people would do that. They would send a physician away because they are too embarrassed by the state of their own home. And we do that with Jesus, sending him away because we are embarrassed by the state of our spiritual home. Why do we turn Jesus away when we know that he is the One who can heal us? Maybe it has something to do with organized religion. Peter may have been the victim of a religious class system, a system that said that only people from a particular family could be priest. Only those of a particular education could be scribes, and Peter was just a fisherman. There was a perception then, and there still is today, that “a man of the cloth” stands closer to God than anyone else. So if you are not “a man of the cloth” you must stand further away from God. And along with that might come some guilt over your own sin – and everyone has sin – and with that guilt comes the idea that God would never choose you to do anything important for him. You just need to go to church and do what your pastor tells you to do. So when Peter recognizes that Jesus is someone holy, his reaction is to distance himself from what is holy, because he himself feels so unholy and thus he feels that he has no business being in Jesus’ presence. That is a rather defeatist attitude that organized religion can perpetuate by feeding your sense that you are not fit enough to stand in God’s presence.

And when you're discouraged from ever becoming spiritually healthy and whole, you can grow complacent with your own sickness. We may look at our state of spiritual health and say, "THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH." We obey civil laws (except those that relate to the speed limit), we smile and say "hi" to our neighbors, and we tell ourselves that we are in a good place spiritually. Now I probably don't help you by telling you just how much God loves you and how he forgives every one of your sins and how it's unimaginable that such a loving God would never bar you from heaven, because that might be an excuse for you to say, "THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH." But good enough is not where God wants you to remain. God wants you to know so much more about his love for you, so much in fact that you won't be able to hold it all within you. He wants your cup to overfloweth. But for that to happen you need to be filled, filled with that loving Spirit, and you can't conjure that up within yourself. You can quit smoking and drinking and cussing and gambling, you can exercise regularly, you can NOT cheat on your taxes and NOT gossip around the water cooler, BUT YOU CAN'T BE MADE WHOLE WITHOUT GOD'S HELP.

I think Jesus' presence made that clear to Peter. He was probably a good man by our standards, taking care of his family, being friendly to his neighbors, paying his crew fair wages. Other people in the community may have even looked up to Peter – he might have been in Rotary or the Kiwanis Club. But on this day he was listening to this stranger speak to a crowd from his boat, and something must have touched him. And when he dropped those nets and all those fish came out of nowhere, not only filling the nets but filling two boats with fish, Peter knew something was different. He was used to the predictable side of life – the average preacher and the average catch of fish, but today he experienced something extraordinary, something divine as a matter of fact. And knowing that he was in the presence of the holy he said, "Get away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man."

But here's the rub. Jesus doesn't go away. He didn't leave Peter, and he doesn't leave us. He beckons us to follow him until we do, even if it takes a lifetime. You cannot cast God away; you can only ignore him. And if there is one thing I know it's a whole lot harder to ignore him than it is to follow him. To ignore him you have to close your eyes, and when you do that you stumble a lot. But when you open your eyes to God's presence, you not only feel that wave of forgiveness splash all over you; you feel that wave push you along the path where Jesus is leading you, a path that leads to healing and wholeness.

Not only that, but you see how the church can play a role in your healing. The church is a place of support and acceptance, of prayer and care and forgiveness. It's a community of healing.

I am so blessed to have met many of the folks in the AA groups who meet in our church, and I hear about their second anniversary, their tenth anniversary, twentieth anniversary, and I admire the way that they encourage and support one another, and they recognize that they could not succeed without that encouragement and that support. So it is with our sins, whatever they may be. We need Jesus, which means we need the Church. We need to trust each other to walk with each other to bring each other to spiritual health and wholeness.