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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Epiphany 5, Series C  
Saturday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Sermon: Gone Fishing  
Text: Luke 5:1-11

Focus: Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

Function: That with clean consciences they would gladly tell the Good News to others.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: “Confession has two parts: first, that we confess our sins; and second, that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven” (SC, Confession).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. I’ve never been a very good fisherman. I never caught “the big one.” But growing up, I did do a lot of fishing. As a child, I lived in a small town southwest of Milwaukee called Muskego. There were three lakes in Muskego, all known for great fishing. My Grandad owned lakefront property on Little Muskego Lake, just 4 miles from our house, so we spent much of our childhood on the water: swimming, boating, waterskiing, canoeing, and, of course, *fishing!* The freshwater lakes in Wisconsin are so chock-full of fish that any idiot can cast his fishing pole from the end of a dock and at least catch a bluegill. Little Muskego boasts a fine fishery full of walleye,

northern pike, and largemouth bass. But I only ever caught bluegills and crappies. As I said, “Any idiot...”

The men in our Gospel lesson were much better fishermen than I. They were professionals. Growing up on the Sea of Galilee (also known as the Lake of Gennesaret), they lived by what they caught. Simon and his brother Andrew, along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were partners in the business. And they were relatively prosperous, too—with at least two boats and a few “hired men” to round out the crew (cf. Mark 1:20).

But the night before our Gospel lesson begins was not a good night. They worked all night and caught nothing. So they began to wash their nets and call it quits for the day when Jesus showed up.

The Lord was standing beside the lake when a crowd pressed in to hear him teach. According to Luke, they wanted “to hear the word of God” (Luke 5:1, ESV).<sup>1</sup> In this way, Jesus’ own teachings are equated with the very Word of God—high praise indeed! And we may marvel

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

that the peasants of Podunk, Galilee, recognized what the spiritual elites of Jerusalem failed to see.

Jesus needed room to work out of reach of the grabbing hands of the crowd. Word had gotten around that he could heal the sick and drive out demons, so that now, wherever he went, he was never undisturbed (4:40-44). Jesus stepped into one of the boats along the shore and asked Simon Peter to row out a little bit from shore. Simon was exhausted from a hard day's night. Nevertheless, he graciously agreed to help the Teacher. So Jesus sat down and made the boat his pulpit and turned the beach into a lakefront church.

We can imagine that the whole time Jesus was speaking, Simon longed for his pillow and a meager bite of breakfast. But when Jesus finished teaching, he wasn't finished.

“Put out into the deep,” Jesus said to Simon, “and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4). It was a strange command from a landlubber like Jesus. Nobody likes to be told how to do their job by people who don't have a clue what it takes to do their job—especially

people who *sweat* for a living. I am certain Simon was a bit annoyed at Jesus' command.

Simon answered Jesus, saying, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5). Simon didn't know Jesus very well—at least not *yet*! But earlier he'd seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law's fever. And, no doubt, he'd heard of Jesus' reputation as a healer. Yet he'd spent the past hour or so listening to Jesus speak the Word of God (v. 1). And that is no small thing! The Bible says that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Jesus' message stirred up something inside of Simon's mind or heart, and he was beginning to see something special and essential about Jesus. Leastways, he saw enough to respectfully call him "Master." And at Jesus' Word, he was willing to give the fishing another try.

So Simon Peter put out for the deep water, and when he began to draw in the net, he'd caught so many fish that he couldn't haul in the catch! Beckoning to his buddies, he signaled for help. But even as they filled the boats with fish, they began to sink!

Suddenly, the light that had begun to dawn in Simon's heart flashed at full brightness and nearly burned him. Now he knew that Jesus was more than just a carpenter or a rabbi. He was no ordinary man. He was more than a man—perhaps even a theophany, or appearance, of God himself! So Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (v. 8). Peter instantly recognized the holiness of Christ, and he was afraid!

I know that many of us sometimes say that we wish we could see God's face, and then we would finally, fully believe. But you should be careful what you wish for! Throughout the Bible, whenever people encounter the divine, they shudder and shy away in fear and wonder. God is dangerous! He is holy and good, but he is dangerous—and we shouldn't forget it. He can allow nothing unclean in his presence. And we are all stained with sin.

That is why, when Moses wanted to see God's glory, Yahweh cautioned him: "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). In our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah's reaction to his heavenly vision was not to shout "Hallelujah!" Rather, he cowered and

cried out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). Simon Peter and his friends were equally horrified by the holiness of Jesus Christ. “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Simon expected to be obliterated and destroyed in a moment. For, as the Bible declares, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). He knew that his sins would ruin him, and he was as good as dead before Jesus’ sight.

But Jesus didn’t kill Simon. Nor did he depart from him. Instead, he stayed right there with him and comforted him with a wonderful Word: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10).

“Fear not!” “Don’t be afraid!” These are words of absolution, assuring the sinful Simon that Jesus does not hold his sins against him and will not punish him because of them. As the burning seraph told Isaiah: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isa. 6:7). God always meets heartfelt repentance

and confession with forgiveness. “A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

Jesus forgave Simon’s sins and then gave him a commission: “From now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). That is a strange thing to say. I wonder what that word meant to Simon. Perhaps he was aware of Jeremiah’s strange prophecy that Yahweh was looking for fishermen. “Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them...” (Jer. 16:16a). But that was a long time ago, more than 500 years before Jesus’ day. What did Simon see in the glint of Jesus’ eye, or hear in the tone of his voice? Whatever it was, it was remarkable. For as soon as Simon and his friends rowed the boats ashore, “they left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:11). They left fishing behind to become fishers of men. (For what it’s worth, the Greek word for “catching” here, *zōgrein*, means “catch alive.” We don’t hunt down converts for the kingdom of God. We don’t catch them dead or alive. We catch them alive. We catch ‘em, and he [*point upward*] cleans ‘em.)

Today's Gospel is a powerful Word for us. During this season of Epiphany, this season of *light*, the Gospel shines a powerful light on Jesus' person and power. First, it reveals that Jesus' teachings are the very Word of God (Luke 5:1). So we had best pay attention to what Jesus says: both his Word of Law and of Gospel, his commands and especially his promises.

Second, this passage proves that Jesus is more than just an ordinary man. Truly, he is the eternal Son of God come down in human flesh! For whether Jesus created a shoal of fish for his purpose or summoned them at precisely the right time and place, we do not know. But what we *do* know is that Jesus performed a miracle that was more than an angler's good luck. Not just another fish story, this true story from the Gospel of Luke reveals the divine light of Christ. Jesus does miracles of creation that only God could do, which means, of course, that Jesus *is* God. He is God incarnate, God with skin in the game, so that he could die for our sins on the cross. God is a life-giving Spirit. But Jesus is God with flesh and blood, breath and bone. Jesus is God *with* us and *for* us!

The third thing we learn today is that we don't have to be afraid of God anymore. Because God has clothed himself in our flesh, his imminence is no longer an immanent threat. His holiness is no longer horrible. Instead of punishing us for our sins, he forgives us. "Do not be afraid," he says to Simon Peter—and to you. Do not be afraid because I have come to take away your sin, to *bear* your sin to the cross, and be your Savior. Here is confession and absolution. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

But that is not Jesus' final Word. Confession leads to commission. After calming Simon's conscience, Jesus says, "From now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10). For the next three-and-a-half years, Jesus would walk and talk with his disciples 24/7. He would show them how to love and serve the lonely, the outcaste, the downtrodden, and the disabled. And he would show them that God's kingdom ultimately comes by scattering seeds instead of throwing stones.

The fishing mission didn't end with Jesus death and resurrection. There is much more to do—even right here in Castle Rock. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Who knows what kind of haul Jesus will bring in! Are you ready for it? Don't be afraid! From now on, we will be catching men and women and children for the kingdom of God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.