

Along the shore of the Galilee... near the community of Capernaum... a border town where the tax collectors lived and worked... along with the rabbis and teachers of the synagogue therein... which was but a short distance from the home of Peter and his mother-in-law... there along the pebble beach onto which the fishing boats had been pulled and secured... there one could find the fishermen... tired from a long and unproductive night of casting their nets... again and again... men who reeked of sweat and the lingering smell of previous catches... cleaning and mending their nets that had grown heavy with the water of the Galilee.

Tired and hungry, probably the only thought they had was to get done, get home, eat their breakfast, and get some sleep... all before it was time to set out to do this all over again! This place was not the tourist spot that it is today, and probably few others even ventured to this place except to get first choice of their catch... or to bring a message to one of the fishermen.

But today was different... as in the distance they could see a rather large number of people drawing closer... apparently following another who was casting an eye their way... one who kept coming nearer. They didn't need this today..., but the crowd didn't seem to understand this. None could imagine what was about to happen... which is where our story begins... with this reading from the gospel of Luke.

A Reading of Luke 5:1-11 (NRSV).....

He got into the boat uninvited. It did not make sense to Peter to do what was asked of him..., but he did it anyway... perhaps just to prove to this man that he did not know what he was talking about when it came to fishing.

The catch was unexplainable to most..., but it was a revelation to Peter who came to understand something about himself as well as this man who had climbed into this boat. In the midst of wet and flopping fish, Peter humbled himself before this stranger and confessed, “*Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!*”

Isn't this where it begins for us as well?

Just as Peter found himself encountered by the Lord – not in the synagogue among the well-dressed but in the midst of his everyday life, so too does the Lord seek to encounter us and others where we are to be found... which may not always be within the hallowed walls of a church sanctuary.

Like Peter, we may have every reason why the Lord would not want us...; and as with Peter, he offers us the same absolution and calling to change our lives and the lives of others: “*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.*”

Sometimes we tend to forget that as Christians “*Our Mission is Fishin'.*” And not with a rod and reel in which we hook people and drag them in fighting us all the way, but with the net of God's love and compassion... a net that is not selective as it seeks to encompass all within its reach... to draw them closer to the Lord as we draw them closer to ourselves and others... and patience... allowing the Holy Spirit to do what we alone cannot accomplish.

Yet to be honest, casting the net is not easy work... but it is the only way to catch what needs to be caught! Then while it may be tempting just to put the net out and wait to see what might wander into it..., that is neither the way to fish nor to reach all who need to be reached. If it comes up empty after being cast out, we need to do again... and again... and often for the same fish we may have missed before... as the Lord never gives up on anyone.

Even as we gather here week after week, the net is cast again... to remind us that the Lord continues to welcome us and all again and again into a loving relationship with himself and with each other.

Each week we are offered new strength and a vision that, I pray, will lead us from this place to share the love of Christ with all – and especially with those whose chances are slim to none of ever walking through the doors of this or any other house of worship on their own.

Yet as we have already heard, that never stopped Jesus... even when he was “uninvited!”

And while “the net” above you* may make you feel a little uncomfortable, all I can say is this:

“Do not be afraid; from now on [the Lord desires that] you will be catching people”

with the love and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ... whose presence we celebrate even now... as we prepare to come to his table.

Hymn of Preparation: # 640 *Take Our Bread*

**A fishing net was suspended above the congregation this Sunday*