

**“Let Down Your Nets”**  
Isaiah 6:8-13; Luke 5:1-11

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In my all-too-IN-frequent forays into the sometimes fruitful, oft-times frustrating world of E-MAILS, earlier this week I came across two messages that were *physically* right next/very close to each other, yet diametrically opposed in their *spiritual* content. One concerned an upcoming national gathering entitled the **“Amplify Conference.”** Its promotional materials stated that **“countless people, loved by God, are living without the hope of the gospel.”** And therefore, **“We must ask ourselves, ‘Are we living each day with an urgency of reaching our world for Christ as we have been commanded?’”**

The other e-mail concerned a recent Barna Group survey of Millennials entitled **“Reviving Evangelism,”** which began by saying that **“Although many Christian young adults say they’re well-equipped to share their faith, and even ‘gifted’ at it, almost half say it’s at least somewhat wrong to share personal religious beliefs with someone of another faith.”** One position that there is an **“urgency of reaching our world for Christ as we’ve been commanded”**... to another that says it’s **“wrong to share personal beliefs.”**

NOW, while I recognize that the ‘someone of another faith’ part does give this latter position perhaps a little different connotation, it does point to a more basic issue that we in the church must grapple with: aware of the **“Great Commission,”** the **command** of Jesus to **“go into the world and preach the Gospel,”** how does that square with the fairly natural, human tendency of ours to believe that it is, in some way, **“wrong to share our personal beliefs”** with others? **If we really have some ‘Good News’ to share...how come it’s so HARD to do so?**

As we consider the stories from our two Bible passages today... from the Divine miracle of a bounteous catch of fish, to an equally miraculous experience of a man ‘catching’ God’s vision... straight from the ‘Heaven’s mouth’... they both ‘speak’ to how we can have an easier time in fulfilling the Great Commission. How we... flawed, imperfect followers though we be... can more readily become **“fishers of men”**... to be able to say, as Isaiah did, **“Here I am; send me!”**

First and foremost, in order to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others, it requires **OBEDIENCE.** Consider the interaction between Simon Peter and Jesus. This seemingly

'perfect stranger' gets into a fisherman's boat and asks him to go out from shore. Where the fisherman has just BEEN for ALL the day! And then, on top of that, goes on to tell him to cast those same 'fruitless' nets back out into the water. The same nets that he had JUST washed and prepared for storage for the night. And yet, that 'fatigued fisherman' didn't hesitate. He OBEYED. Why? Well, while we don't know all that was going on in Simon's head, but one would have to think that he had heard of this Jesus, and had listened to him when he spoke to those who gathered at the shore of Lake Gennesaret (aka, the 'Sea of Galilee'). That when this 'Nazarene' opened His lips, in the words of Mark, this simple fisherman was ***"astonished at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority."*** (Mark 1:22)

Perhaps it was when Simon looked into his **eyes**, and found in their piercing stare a certain '**gravity**,' an '**attraction**,' that was **irresistible**. Or maybe a **spirit**, a **force**, a **power** that **demanded attention, commanded respect**. Whatever it was, the reward for Simon's obedience was swift and overwhelming. A 'bad day fishing AND working' (one in the same) quickly turned into a GREAT day fishing and working... and they knew that they had this mysterious man from Galilee to thank for it. They experienced great blessing... because they trusted and obeyed this Man named Jesus. Jesus proved Himself to be **trustworthy**. Invoking **confidence** to be **followed**. And to **invite others to follow as well**.

Out of this great example of obedience also came a strong sense of **HUMILITY**. One would think that having been the beneficiary of such a tremendous bounty of fish would make a *fisherman* jump for JOY. Well, Simon acted more like he wanted to jump OVERBOARD! Instead of giving high-fives all >>around, including to Jesus, this first-Century 'Skipper' of the 'SS Minnow' cries out ***"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."*** (Luke 5:8) If he would have been familiar with Isaiah's words, Simon could've borrowed from what we read earlier: ***"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips..."*** (Isaiah 6:5)

Why was he so down on himself? Because he knew that such a miracle was indeed a 'GOD THING.' Nothing short of the work of the Almighty. And he knew that he was not worthy, deserving, of such an outpouring of blessing from his Heavenly Father... or His Son. (Like the famous line from "Wayne's World": ***"We're not worthy..."*** AND YET... it was JUST this sense of UN-worthiness that indeed made Simon Peter WORTHY to be called as a disciple of Jesus.

Because he wasn't full of HIMSELF, he could therefore be filled with GOD. Being HONEST about the ways he had been 'fooled' by the world in the *past* would enable him to be a 'fool for Christ' in the *future!*

Perhaps this sense of 'healthy humility' would convince Simon that if God could bless someone as 'sinful,' as 'unworthy' of God's favor as himself, then how much could God use others who were equally 'unworthy?' Might Jesus have had humble folks like this fisherman in mind when He began his Sermon on the Mount with that curious 'BE-ATTITUDE'... ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matthew 5:3) I am reminded of one of my favorite songs/Scriptures about the 'humility' of being 'poor in spirit': ***"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up."***(James 4:10) With **humility** comes **ability!**

Aside from **obedience** to God, and **humility** of self, there is a third element necessary in fulfilling our charge to sharing the Good News. And that is **HOPE** for others. As caught up as Simon was in his own 'stuff,' Jesus let him know that God was going to use him not merely for catching lots of cold-blooded fish, but for drawing in red-blooded human beings. ***"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."*** (Luke 5:10) 'Because I am with you, you will be able to draw others to witness the same kind of miracles that you saw with these 'measly little fish.' Just like you were **filled with despair** over your **failures** until I came along, so too will you be able to **bring to others** that **hope** I brought to you.'

Even in that not-so-cheery picture that Isaiah painted of those whose pride would not let them see God's truth, and how ***"cities lie in waste without inhabitants... the land is utterly desolate... vast is the emptiness,"*** the passages yet ends with a glimmer of HOPE: ***"The holy seed is its stump."*** (Isaiah 6:13) Just what is that 'holy seed?' The new growth that can only come from the Giver of Life. The HOPE that came in the form of a newborn babe. The LIGHT that drives out the darkness. The One who replaces 'bad news' and 'fake news' with GOOD NEWS...

So, how do we overcome that inward resistance that tells us its 'wrong to share our faith?' First and foremost, because we are to OBEY the one who speaks with such authority. Jesus said 'GO'... so we are to GO! But not out of fear. But because as we look at Jesus through the lens of Scripture, we not only hear His commands, but sense His presence. As we read of

the real-life encounters of Jesus, we can feel those same eyes that Simon saw also looking at us... eyes that pierce into our very marrow. Like those first disciples, we too can be drawn to a Spirit of compassion, a strength that empowers us, a love that protects us.

In order to share our faith with others, we must be HUMBLE. We must remember that Jesus loves us not because we are deserving, or 'good,' or wise, or generous. Jesus loves us IN SPITE of ourselves. In a world where survival and acceptability are based on strength, on performance, on merit, we serve a revolutionary God who loves us when we are weak, when we fail, when we are most UN-deserving. And that's just US here in this room...

We must be witness to our Christian faith because we serve a God of HOPE. Let's face it, we in this church are a 'house without many people'... one that has experienced emptiness, desolation, people 'sent away.' And yet, we are ***"an oak whose stump remains standing"...*** and ***"the holy seed is its stump."*** (Isaiah 6:13) And because of that 'holy seed' that we carry around with us... the invigorating, renewing, regenerating life of Jesus Christ... these 'stumps' **will yet thrive!** BUT WE WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO 'THRIVE' AS WE HELP TO PLANT THOSE SEEDS IN OTHER 'SOIL'... AS WE 'LET DOWN OUR NETS' IN OTHER SEAS.

Now, I know that for some of you, the thought of 'letting down your net' is very troubling. And in one way or another, most every week I encourage the church to 'go fishing'... for people. I had a conversation with one a church member this past week who said that it was hard enough for her just to go to church in the morning... let alone invite someone ELSE to go with her. And when she hears me talk about the need to do what she is NOT doing, the good feeling she wants to leave church with is displaced with guilt.

Now, as you hopefully know, I am ALL ABOUT leaving church with a smile on your face. I really resonate with the statement that 'there is nothing more damaging to the Christian witness than a *joyless Christian!*' That being said, I've also declared my simplified job description as *"to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."* That a certain degree of 'guilt' can be motivating in bringing about more positive behavior. But I want to clarify to you all just what 'sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ' really means. Is it articulating what your relationship with God means to you. Yes. Is that articulation always done with words? NO.

Does sharing your faith mean you have to go door-to-door, neighbor-to-neighbor, co-worker to co-worker, 'telling them about Jesus?' NO. I will give you an example.

At the Golden Age Nursing Home in Welsh there is a long-time resident there known as 'Mayor Tiny.' And that term is meant in the most complimentary way. Her 'acclimation' as 'mayor' comes out of Respect. Friendship. Leadership. Qualities that still continue to be exhibited by a lady who has been basically confined to her bed for at least a year. She can articulate pretty well, but not as good as she once could. She sure can't get out and go door-to-door 'evangelizing.' And yet, with most everyone that comes through her door, she 'shares the Good News of Jesus Christ.' By her **obedience**. By her **humility**. By the **hope** she embodies. Her very **spirit** bears witness to her faith. No matter what physical weakness she might bear, ***"the joy of the Lord is her strength."*** **She catches fish alright... not with a '30 lb. test line'... but with her very 'LIFE-LINE!'**

And it is just such an example that I lift up to all of you. That whenever you get like Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen... weary, discouraged, ready to quit... remember people like 'Mayor Tiny.' That sharing your faith isn't about your age, your health, your 'position in life' (horizontal or vertical)... it's simply about listening to the voice of Jesus... to **"Let down your nets" ...**