

Sunday March 22, 2020

Good morning. As we worship together and yet separately, I ask you to think and pray for those you would normally see and hear. We are not meeting together as directed by those in authority over us, both our church and government leaders.

Let us pray together that God would us allow to meet again soon.

Our Father, we ask that you would move in our world to wipe our planet clean from this pandemic that is keeping us from gathering. We pray that you would work your will in our lives and the lives of those around us, that you would move in people's hearts and draw them to yourself. As we begin to worship separately, we ask your blessing on our time together. Amen.

Let us read from Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 through 8:

**6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:**

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

**<sup>4</sup> The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”**

**<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup> The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” <sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”**

This event in the life of Isaiah is very much like the event in the life of Peter as he encounters Jesus on Lake Gennesaret. When you read through the writings of Isaiah the prophet one of the things you come across is the wickedness of the time in which he lived. Isaiah must have felt very alone in serving God. He may have felt he was better than many of the people in his day. But then he meets God and realizes his moral depravity. When he did meet God, he realized how different and far from God he was. Most of us have no trouble finding someone who can make us feel morally or spiritually superior, but other people are not who we are trying to be like. As Christians we are called to be like Jesus and that is a whole lot harder than being like another person we know. For all of us when we are alone with God, we see how deficient we are and how far from perfection we are, just as Isaiah and Peter did.

However, in both accounts we see God offering us something we don't deserve.

He wants to make us clean and useful.

Again, He wants to make us clean and useful.

For Isaiah, an angel does the cleaning and healing work, and for Peter, Jesus does the cleaning and healing work. Payment for the services will ultimately be made for both Peter and Isaiah when Jesus dies as payment for their sins and for ours as well. They looked forward to the hope of the Messiah, and Peter even lived to see the hope fulfilled that first Easter, when Jesus conquered death and sin.

It doesn't end there for either Peter or Isaiah or even us. God wants to use us to bless the world around us because of the work he has done in us. Remember the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, "preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

Let us worship in song.

Turn in your hymnal to number 6 and sing *Be Exalted, O God*

Let us pray for those who lead us and our missionaries:

Father, we pray for our president and governor, we pray for those in the legislator and for judges. We pray for those who serve at the county and municipal levels. We pray for wisdom as they govern and that you would give them godly counsel and that they would heed it.

We pray for our church leaders, for Pastor Dennis and Pastor Doug, that you would bless them as they lead and give them wisdom. Bless their staff as well.

We pray for our missionaries: For Chelsey, that you would make her time fruitful as she prepares for changes in the summer and those students in need of help in this time of crisis. For Rachel, that you would give her safety in her travels and as she leads in the training of people who teach children. For Chris and Amy, that you would give them favor as they work to train new leaders in the church in Africa, and that you would give them favor with the government to work the accrediting process. Amen.

Please take your hymnal and sing number 472 *Rejoice, the Lord is King*.

Now among yourselves rejoice in the good things that God has done in your lives and pray for the needs that you have. Also, pray that we as a congregation may know what to do in this time of a worldwide pandemic.

I have been reading from the sermons of John Chrysostom on the Gospel of John, and he is continually drawn to the love of Christ as portrayed by John. This leads me to remember the importance of hymn 250, *Jesus Loves Me*. Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, said by some to be the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas, said in an interview; the sum of his theology was the great American hymn, *Jesus Loves Me*. By the way, Barth's work which he did not complete was over 9000 pages long. Let's sing together.

We now continue our series in the Gospel of Luke, reading chapter 5, verses 1 to 11.

**5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Let us pray:

Father, as we approach your word, may the truth of it penetrate our lives in a way that changes us for the better. To be made clean and useful for you. Amen.

Simon, as Luke calls him, is the man, we commonly call Peter. In the previous chapter, Jesus had healed Simon’s mother in law. So when Jesus asked to use Peter’s boat as a speaking platform, Peter must have felt some sort of obligation. He does not protest but let Jesus use his boat as a way of addressing a much larger crowd.

Just to get a perspective on the size of this lake, it is 64 square miles, while Moosehead lake is 118 square miles and Sebago lake is 48 square miles. Most fishing boats of the time period were 16 to 20 feet long. The boats were stable under normal conditions, but not very good in a storm.

We do not know what Jesus was teaching the people, but that isn’t the point of the story. This story is one that is repeated over and over again in Luke and Acts. The point is that to be useful to God we have to be aware of our need for Him. We, each and every one of us, must recognize that we are the worst sinner we know. There are 3 New Testament letters written to pastors. The longest of them is 1 Timothy. It is written by the apostle Paul to his “son in the faith” giving him direction. In the first chapter he makes this point clear. Look at what he writes in verses 15 and 16:

**<sup>15</sup> The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.**

It is not just these people that need to live this way, but each and every one of us.

But how did Peter get this point. He had let Jesus use his boat and in return Jesus compensated him for the use of his boat. The problem for Peter was the compensation did not make any sense and may also have seemed like an overpayment. Peter realizes he has encountered someone who commanded creation. He had encountered God. He calls him master,

according to Luke. He is not called Rabbi or prophet but one with authority. Jesus has authority and we are called to recognize that authority. It is not our authority, but his. John chapter one tells us that he created all things in the beginning. Colossians one tells us that he holds everything together. When you feel things blowing apart, know he cares for you. He loves you and cares for you.

Peter and his business partners have worked all night. If he is anything like me, when he is done working all night, he is ready for some sleep. He helps Jesus out with his boat. And now Jesus tells him to use the net he has just cleaned. Okay, so I'm Peter and I know this guy healed my mother in law: I'm grateful so I'll do as he asks even though I'm going to have to clean the net again because all I'm going to catch is weeds and sticks, but I'll humor the guy.

So, Peter does as Jesus asks and he gets the biggest catch of his life. In fact, he needs another boat because the catch is so big. God has provided and he is humbled. He knows he is not good enough. Until each and every one of us comes to that point we cannot be useful to God.

Peter admits his unworthiness and Jesus makes Simon, whom we know as Peter, useful. The unworthy becomes the leader who takes over when Jesus ascends to heaven. When God calls, he provides. Sometimes we are like the apostle Paul where we keep working to earn a living while we preach. Others are paid by those who are taught by them. With Peter he leaves his boat and follows Jesus. He doesn't sell anything and the business continues. Perhaps he received income even though he wasn't there, perhaps not. We do not know the details.

What we do know is the miraculous catch of fish convinces Peter to follow Jesus. Jesus is the Elijah/Elisha that was to come. Elijah in 1 Kings 17 asks a widow during a famine to make him some food even though she only has enough for her last meal. She gives him a meal, and her food supply miraculously lasts until the famine ends. Elisha in 2 King 4 sees a faithful widow of one the prophets suffering in poverty during a famine. He tells her to borrow jars and fill them with oil from an oil canter she has. She fills many gallons of oil out of her container, he then tells her to sell it and pay her bills. You can read these stories in detail later. The point is, God cares for you and has provided for you in Jesus. Both in this life and after this life, Jesus is the answer.

Peter leaves all and follows Jesus. Will you leave all and follow Jesus or are you going to trust yourself. For me I have decided to follow Jesus. I don't always get it right but I know the direction I am headed. Do you? Will you follow Jesus? I trust you will.

Following Jesus as Peter does begins with surrendering your all to Jesus. Please close by sing hymn 166 *I Surrender All*.

May God bless you and use you mightily as you serve Him in the coming week. Amen.