

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the great fisherman, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

I wish I had this great fishing story to lead with this morning. It just seems right to talk about that time when I had the big one on the hook, how I'd plied the rod and reel for what seemed like an eternity giving out line and reeling it back in to tire out the huge fish. Then, how I finally got him up to the side of the boat and lifted him out of the water and into my net. How all my friends on the fishing trip congratulated me for nabbing the biggest fish of the day as we posed for pictorial proof of the size of that leviathan I'd pulled up. How I singlehandedly caught, filleted, and cooked the huge monster. I wish I had such a story to tell... The last time I was on a boat fishing, my son, brother-in-law, son-in-law, and nephews took a header boat out on the great sea to the north, Lake Erie. We fished all day, battling the waves and running away from pop-up storms on the lake. In the end I didn't even catch a fish worthy to be brought in.

I don't make a very good fisherman, but Simon, James, and John were professionals. They caught fish for a living. They understood the lake, the weather, and the patterns of the schools of fish in that lake. When Jesus asked Simon to go out to the deep water and try one more time, he objected, but did as Jesus asked. He was already finished for the night and was cleaning the seaweed out of the nets and sewing up any holes that might let fish escape the next time

they put out to sea. These highly trained Fishing experts had done everything they knew how to do, all night long and had caught Bupkis. You can almost hear the thoughts running through Simon's brain... "Who is this guy? What makes him think he can tell me how and where to find fish." He even informs Jesus they had already been out there all night. Then he thinks to himself, like guys do, "what have I got to lose... I'm already the laughingstock of the pier, coming up empty after being out all night... Ok Jesus let's put out to the deep water." We all know the rest of the story. From John's Gospel we know that about 153 fish would stretch the limits for one of the boats, but on this day, the catch was so big it filled 2 boats to the point of sinking. It was a miracle!

Yes, it was a miracle, but that's not the point of Luke's story. Simon, later called Peter, was already familiar with this man called Jesus. He had heard rumors of people being healed and something about a bunch of water being turned into wine at a wedding not too far away in Cana. Wherever Jesus went he amazed the people by his words and the authority by which he spoke them. Now this Jewish Rabbi had demonstrated his authority over not just the words of scripture, but also over nature itself. This is a miracle story, but so much more. Some scholars refer to it as a call story. The call of Jesus first disciples, where the miracle only serves to advance the plot of the story and make Simon Peter aware of who this Jesus really is. From the miraculous catch, Peter figures out he's in the presence of the

divine and realizes his own sinfulness. He falls to his knees and begs Jesus to leave him. After being reassured by Jesus, Simon and his partners James and John leave everything behind and they all follow Jesus.

It's a good fish story, but what are we to learn from it and what importance is it for our lives today? With the possible exception of Mark Brumbaugh, none of us has ever made our living fishing. At most we only go out on the water as a hobby. For most of us, the context and underlying nuances are lost. So, here's how I understand this story... Let's imagine Simon, James, and John are stand-ins for people. Most people, like Simon, have heard stories about Jesus. Some have even read his books... Many might even admire Jesus as a good man, a great teacher, or a supernatural miracle worker. Almost everyone today knows a bit about Jesus, but they aren't his followers or disciples. Something happened that day for Simon and it fundamentally changed who he was, to the point where it even changed his name. What happened? He encountered the Son of God. He saw in Jesus something more than just a great man, teacher, Rabbi, or miracle worker. The scales fell from his eyes and he was able to see, in Jesus, the presence of God. His first reaction, like many others since, was to fall to his knees and confess his sinful nature.

Today, most of us would never think to do that. We're taught from the time we're toddlers that we're mostly good, well at least pretty good people. I mean in

our congregation look how many of us are involved in so many ministries...

We're basically good people, right? We're so conditioned to think about the good things we do, we forget our true nature and the old Adam and Eve that still live inside each of us. In true Godly style, Jesus calms Simon-Peter's fears and invites him to use his fishing skills to catch people for the Kingdom of God. In one sentence Jesus lets Simon know he is forgiven and despite his sinful nature, God has a use for him. I said in true Godly style because that's exactly the way God works, and the type of people God chooses to work through. Ordinary, sinful, and sometimes broken people are best suited for work in the Kingdom of God...

Being a fisherman is hard work and it was even harder during the time of Jesus. They spent a lot of time cleaning and mending their nets. Their boats and their nets were more than simple possessions. They represented their entire way of life. They spent the vast majority of their waking hours either out on the water, in their boats, casting their nets or on the beach cleaning and fixing both boat and net. Yet after this encounter with the divine presence of God, they left everything to follow Jesus.

If you would ever have such an encounter with Jesus what would you do? What holds you back from following him more closely? Simon, James and John had a fishing business with at least 2 boats that we know of and all their nets. Even more than boats and nets they up and left that great catch of fish right there on the

dock. We all have something holding us back. I almost never made it through seminary because I was held back by the love of my family. For my third year of Seminary training I interviewed for lots of internship positions, but the ones that felt like a match between me and the potential Pastor Supervisor were all in far away places like Texas or Iowa. The closest one I thought was even remotely right for me was in Toledo. All of these potential internship sites would have required me to move and leave my family behind. I wasn't willing to make that sacrifice. It literally came down to the last day of the selections, when I was surprised by my Former Pastor and mentor Pastor Craig Fourman. His church, Abiding Christ, in Fairborn had agreed to help the Lutheran Church in Xenia with the cost of having me as their intern. I ended up having one of the best years of my life learning and studying with Pastor Glen Bengson. Without the assistance from Abiding Christ, I would have been stuck with my boats and nets because I couldn't leave them behind. From that experience, I learned that when God calls and you have a desire to answer the call, miraculous things suddenly begin to happen. That's only one of the many miracles that brought this sinful, broken person to fall to my knees, declare my unworthiness, but then get up and go where Jesus leads.

There have been so many other such small miracles I can no longer count them all, but the point of any miracle is to help us see the presence of the Holy and Divine God working in our lives. I know you have had those same God moments,

where you had such a clear encounter with the divine you were humbled, forgiven, joyful, and thankful all at the same time. It's like an overflowing cup. May Jesus come into each of our lives every day with the same authority and power he had in Simon Peter's life. May we, as individual disciples of Jesus or as a congregation, never refuse to put out to the deep water and try one more time to follow where Jesus bids us go. Even if it seems like we've been fishing the same pond for years without catching a single fish. May our perseverance in following our Master and our King fill our days with life and joy. May your fishing be an adventure and the catch miraculous! Amen.