

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

His whole life he had been waiting for a catch like this – but just when he had it he walked away from it all. It would be like Peyton Manning deciding at 3 pm today that he is retiring. Right then, at that moment – before the game he has been dreaming of all his life. Impossible. Simon had toiled day and night for fish – he had fished the whole night before and had not even a minnow to show for his effort but then Jesus had come along – sent him out fishing once more and then his boat was so full of fish it was almost sinking. As soon as the boat touched shore - before the fish were even sorted and sold – even before the pictures were taken – Simon walked away from it all. Walked away from his dream come true.

Now as Luke tells the story this was not Simon's first encounter with Jesus. Jesus had been to Simon's house – Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. Jesus spoke and the fever left her. And she got up and served Jesus and the others.

But Simon did not follow Jesus then. Maybe he heard about all the other healing Jesus was doing – how he was casting out demons. But Simon kept on fishing until that day.

But that day Jesus was standing beside the Sea of Galilee – also known as the lake of Gennesaret – Jesus was teaching and the people were crowding around to hear him. Jesus had no microphone – no large video screen to project his image – just his voice – no wonder the people were crowding in to hear. Jesus got into Simon's boat that was docked nearby and asked Simon to put out a little from shore. From there a great many more could hear Jesus'

voice reflected off of calm water and they could see him, too, with nothing near him to hide him from view. When Jesus had finished speaking he decided to pay the rent for the boat time he had used. He told Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

I have to give Simon credit. How many times a suggestion has been offered and my response is, “We already tried that. It did not work.” But Simon said, “If you say so, I will let down the nets.”

In an instant the nets were full – so full another boat had to be called in. Fish, fish, fish. When Simon saw it he fell down at Jesus’ knees saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

What a strange response! We might have expected Simon to say, “Jesus, can we put you on the payroll – I’ll give you 40% of the profits. You tell us where to fish – I will take care of the rest – we will make a great team.”

But Simon said, “Go away from me, Lord.” Go away for I am a sinful man.

The healing of his mother-in-law did not have the same effect that the catch of fish did. Simon knew those waters, knew that what he had witnessed was not possible unless God did it. Jesus was not just a holy man – Jesus was God. Lord.

That made Simon afraid. It is one thing to talk about God – to think about God – even to pray to God. It is quite another to be face to face with God.

Go away from me, Lord.

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus told Simon, “from now on you will be catching people.” Simon left everything and followed Jesus.

Could it happen to you? Could you become so convinced of Jesus’ power and love that you would walk away from your dreams? Simon took a chance on Jesus and his whole life was changed.

“Do not be afraid” was Jesus word to him. Do not be afraid.

If you were not afraid what might Jesus lead you to do? Who would you tell about Jesus if you were not afraid?

What money would you give to help others if you were not afraid?

What changes would you make in your life if you were not afraid?

That day Simon believed Jesus' word and followed but another day would come and Simon would be afraid once more. He would be known as Peter, then – Jesus would be on trial and a servant girl would accuse Peter of being with Jesus. And Peter would declare that he did not know Jesus – never knew Jesus. Three times he would deny Jesus.

“Go away from me lord, for I am a sinful man,” Peter had said. True words.

But our second lesson tells us that after Jesus was raised from the dead he appeared to Cephas – the Aramaic word for Peter – which means rock. First of all the disciples Jesus appeared to Peter, Cephas, Simon - the sinful man.

Do not be afraid. Even if you fail Jesus, Jesus will not fail you. Take a chance – go out into the deep water of your life – join Jesus in fishing for people.

There will be a great catch.

Let go of whatever holds you back. Simon walked away from all those fish. Let go of whatever holds you back.

Do not be afraid.