

## Lord, For I am a Sinful Man!

It's been said that, "Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans." The disciples didn't get their call from Jesus when they were looking for it. Rather, they received the call after a long and disappointing night where they were packing everything up to head home for the day. Unfortunately, catching nothing was most likely a typical day for them. They were washing their nets at the shore when Jesus approached them. This is when everything about their typical lives changed.

Jesus had already been tested in the wilderness, healed people, and a crowd was following him to hear his words. They were getting closer and closer to Jesus until he was right next to the water's edge. Jesus steps into Simon's boat and asks him to put the boat back into the water. This may have been the most important decision he ever made in his life. Even though Simon is tired from a long night of fishing but catching nothing, he pushes the boat into the water.

Once Jesus finished teaching, he turned to Simon who was most likely sore and very tired from fishing all day. Jesus instructed him to "put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." In other words, move from the shallow waters to the deeper more troubled waters. Deeper waters have stronger currents which most likely pulls and pushes the boat relentlessly. When fishing in the open sea, there are always risks for falling, slipping or drowning.

What do you think Simon was thinking at this time? Did he really want to try fishing again? Was he inclined to refuse because the nets were already cleaned? Before Jesus came along, he was ready to give up for the day.

Nevertheless, Simon responded with “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” There are several times in my life where I felt like I was being drawn (or nudged) in a certain direction that seemed impossible. Like what I was asked to do would definitely lead to failure. For example, I started attending the Ministry Development Team meetings to simply learn. I certainly did not have a goal to stand here and give this sermon today. In fact, I think I may have quit going to the MDT classes if I had known I would be standing here. Hindsight is 20/20. I guess it is a good thing that I can not see into the future or I would be afraid to step outside of my house.

When Simon, James and John did what Jesus asked them to do, “they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.” When they emptied the nets of fish into the boats, the boats were too full and started to sink. This is when Simon fell to his knees and said to Jesus, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Simon knew this was only something that God could do. Such a response in our modern world may seem odd, however, it was a very natural and appropriate response in the ancient world. If you were Jewish, being in the presence of God was a scary experience since faith would

have been described as “fear the Lord”. As part of the Hebrew tradition, you were required to make sacrifices, confess your sins, and be clean. Simon knew that he was not clean.

As Christians, Simon’s confession is our confession, “Lord, we are sinful people”. While Jesus calls us to “fish” people, we are also those individuals who needs to be pulled out of the mirky, troubled, deep waters.

Today’s Gospel gives us insight as to how God works. We don’t have to be sinless for God to love us, we don’t have to be perfect to be called, we just have to listen and be ready. God loves us for the way we are...now. I’m talking about this with you today, however, I have to admit I always feel unworthy.

Jesus did not condemn Simon for his sins. Instead, Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” Simon was called to do something that changed his life forever. All of us are called to make the choice to follow Jesus...hearing it is not enough...

Looking back at my life, I feel like it just happened. I truly believe God uses each of us in our own specific situations to throw us a life-line when we need it. Like Simon, James and John, God finds us not if but when...wherever we are...in whatever we are doing...and then...shows us something...event though it is not in our plans.

One more thing...From today's Gospel, we can assume Simon and his partners failed at their job to fish. They fished all night and caught nothing. The very reason Jesus could take over Simon's boat is because there were no fish in it...there was plenty of room to occupy space. Jesus did not call on these men because they displayed all the gift and graces for discipleship. Jesus called them after he showed them they can catch fish with his help. Simon was not called to "fish" for people by himself but because Jesus did this through Simon.

And so it is true with us. The very moment we acknowledge that have nothing worthy for the ministry of the church may be the very moment when Christ begins to use us in ways we could never have imagined.