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The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke, the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter.  
Glory to you, O Lord.

<sup>1</sup>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.

The Gospel of the Lord!  
Praise to you, O Christ!

In this season of Epiphany, the weeks after Christmas, the church hears again the story of Jesus’ early ministry. We’ve seen Jesus baptized, we’ve heard him teach and preach, and now we see him starting to call the apostles. I wonder if even Simon Peter knew how this story was going to end.

He's just trying to make a buck, right? He's back from a night of fishing with nothing to show for it, except nets that need to be cleaned. Jesus clearly sees more than that in him.

I'm going to make a few guesses here. My first guess is that Peter knows who Jesus is. In a small town, they're bound to at least know of each other. My second guess is that Jesus knows Peter. I don't just mean that Jesus knows about Peter. I'm thinking that Jesus knows Peter better than Peter knows himself just yet. Jesus sees the potential as well as the current reality. I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus picks that particular boat to use as his floating pulpit.

Peter doesn't know that he will be Jesus' witness to the ends of the earth. He doesn't know that he's going to die the death of a martyr. He knows that he's tired, but that there's something compelling about this Jesus guy.

There must have been something special about Jesus. Not only does Simon take him out in the boat, after a hard night's work, so that Jesus can preach to the crowds, but then he listens to this carpenter tell him about fishing. He's just cleaned his nets, but when Jesus says to let them down one more time, he listens. He protests a bit, perhaps, but he does it.

And you know how it goes. There are so many fish that these tough fishermen need to call in backup. The whole team has to go out to bring in that catch.

Simon has won the lottery. But instead of cashing in on that haul, he leaves the whole thing behind, boats, nets, fish, all of it—to follow Jesus.

We might wonder what Simon Peter was thinking. I definitely have. But today, I'm curious about what Jesus was thinking.

What did Jesus see in this guy? Was it the way he worked alongside his family? Was it the diligence with which he did his job? Was it his impulsiveness? His loyalty? His willingness to listen to what Jesus says and to do it?

Simon Peter is going to be one of the foremost of the disciples. Jesus will say that Simon Peter is the rock on which he will build the church. Right now, it's hard for us to see that potential. I would imagine that it's hard for Peter to see that potential, too.

Simon Peter didn't know what all he had in him. He knew one thing, though. He knew he was a sinful man, not worthy to be in the presence of the Almighty God. To see the face of God, before Jesus' birth, was to die. Human beings simply aren't prepared to experience God's fullness like that. When Simon Peter sees the miracle that is this huge catch of fish, he kneels before Jesus to make it clear that Jesus should just move along for everyone's safety. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Peter gets it. He understands that this isn't just a net full of fish. This is a sign that God is present right there with them. This is a revelation of who Jesus is.

In that revelation, Simon Peter also gets a better understanding of who he is. He doesn't see all of it, but he sees enough to follow. He sees what he needs to for the next step.

What I find really interesting here is that Peter confesses his sinfulness, and then Jesus calls him to follow. He doesn't forgive him. He doesn't excuse him. He just says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

I wonder how often Jesus has this conversation with his followers. I wonder how often Jesus has had this conversation with us. We start to feel a call from God—something big like a career change or something small, like starting a conversation with someone we hardly know—and we try to talk God out of it. "Jesus, I can't go talk to that person. I don't have the right words." "God, I want to follow your call, but I just don't have time to take the classes to become a foster parent." "Lord, if you knew the mistakes in my past, you wouldn't be asking me to do that new thing. I'm just not that sort of person."

That's how most of the prophets react to God's call. Isaiah says that he can't go for God because he's got unclean lips. Moses tells God that he can't lead because he stutters. Esther says that she can't stand up to the king because it might get her killed. Jeremiah says that he's too young. Amos says that he's just a farmer and shepherd. Jonah says he doesn't like what God has to say and literally tries to run away rather than speak a word of grace to his enemies.

I don't know about you, but I find it comforting that the prophets had their flaws. God called all these people. And you know what, it worked. God worked through all of them. This strange cast of characters wrote and starred in the most popular book of all time: the Bible. Simon Peter is following in the great tradition of people

who are willing to follow God but have no idea why God has chosen them in particular.

As we read through the gospels, we discover that the apostles have their flaws, too. Simon Peter will deny Jesus three times, and stick his foot in his mouth in a thousand other situations. Those are standards I can live up to.

God's call is something that happens again and again in our lives. God calls us to befriend people. God calls us to different jobs, or to activities that make our hearts sing with joy. We might be called to help out at a camp or to take care of someone who needs it. A calling to give something up or take something on might be for a season or for a lifetime.

God will call you. It might be a phone call. An angel might appear in your dreams. Or you might feel a quiet tugging on your heartstrings that just won't go away. When it happens—and it will, and probably already has—take the advice that Jesus gives Simon Peter when his call came. “Do not be afraid!”

Do not be afraid. God knows you, deeply and intimately. God is aware of every single awkward moment, every thought that should not have been said in your out loud voice, every bit of clutter in your closet and in your brain. So when God calls you, God calls YOU. Not the version everyone else knows, not even the version you want to tell yourself you are. God calls the whole, full, flawed but glorious person that you are.

Just like Jesus called Simon Peter, when he was tired at the end of a long work day. Just like Jesus calls Vacation Bible School teachers, people who deliver meals to the vulnerable, people who pray without ceasing, and all the people who make up the body of Christ.

God knows us fully. And God loves us completely. And God trusts us to be part of the holy work of this world. What a high and holy calling. Do not be afraid.