

“We will give thanks to you, O Lord,
with our whole heart and sing your praise.” AMEN!

There’s a weird sort of desperation
that comes when it’s time to write the sermon
and you’re not quite sure what
the Spirit wants you to say.

Preachers are taught to wait and pray
for the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to come,
but that voice in the head still whispers
as time passes,

“What if nothing arrives?
What will you say?”

The voice might even whisper,
“What can your words even do
to improve the world, anyway?”

That is when I become thankful
for Bible stories like the ones today.

The ones that remind us of the kind of people
God chooses to do great things. :-)

In Isaiah we read of an incredulous scene
where the prophet witnessed the

greatness of God.

With terrifying seraphs, which are winged serpents,
the foundations rattle and quake at
the singing and in the moment Isaiah
thought he was about to die.

No one could see God and live,
so in his desperation he proclaimed his sinfulness.

“Woe is me!” He shouted.

“I am lost and unclean and I live among
a lost and unclean people.”

But then, look!

In his desperation something incredible happened.

Forgiveness poured out.

We find God making him clean and
then giving him a job to do.

And then in the 1st Corinthians reading
we read that “by the grace of God I am
what I am,” and even though Paul
had done awful things;
unjust and murderous things,

it wasn't until Paul was made desperate...

that he came to recognize that Jesus
was the Son of God. (Pause)

So, there is something to this
feeling of desperation, I think.

Have you ever been desperate
in the presence of God, like Isaiah?

Where the only thing you could do was
fall to your knees and beg
for mercy and forgiveness?

Have you been desperate, like Paul?

Thinking one moment you were doing God's will
but then realizing all along that you were
in fact hurting the people God loved?

That's what Paul was doing when
he was younger and named Saul.

He hurt people who followed Jesus' way.

It can be quite the epiphany to realize
the person we persecute is Jesus.

Yet, God did not let the persecution continue.

Christ intervened and knocked
Saul to the ground, blinding him.

That holy “reset” led to an invitation from God
to come and be changed.

An invitation to be made new like Saul was
made new and became Paul.

Then God sent him to tell people about Jesus;
to pass on the grace bestowed to people
even like him was something we can
all receive in the times of desperation
and even share to others. (Pause)

Moving into our gospel lesson today,
it is no surprise to most of us that Jesus
called the people who fish to be his followers.

In the Bible fishing is a metaphor
for telling people about God.

The patience that is needed to be
a successful angler is the same patience
that is needed in speaking to people
about matters of faith;

The same patience needed to
tell people about God's love for them;
patience needed to show love
by the way we live. (Pause)

At first, though it just appears that it's
just a beautiful day by the lakeshore.

A crowd gathered to hear Jesus teach.

The desperation was present as we are told how
they were hungry for the word of God and
pressed down upon Jesus.

There's that thread of desperation, again.

Jesus had a solution, perhaps one of these
fisherman would let him teach from their boat.

It quickly changes from teaching the crowd
about God to a lesson about who God calls.

Ordinary people, who have bad days at work.

People who don't have it all together.

People who are fractured and broken.

If you are like me then that makes us

feel a whole lot better to know this truth...

We are a broken and fractured people.

Those professional fishermen
had not caught a thing.

They'd go home empty handed and hungry.

No food for themselves or their family.

No income that day... what a failure of a day!

Theirs was a desperation unlike mine,
or Isaiah's, or even Paul's.

Yet, what happened that day at the lake speaks
to all who feel desperate.

The crowd that pressed in on Jesus was desperate
to hear the word of God, fishermen
were desperate for a catch, and after
working all night, they were exhausted.

We get a sense of what they were feeling.

We are also desperate for the word of God.

We are exhausted from separation and

worry of sickness.

Grief stricken over the loss of loved ones...
tired of the direction of our politics...
we are people hungry for a touch or hug.

How long must we wait for an act from God?

We could also use a miraculous catch! (Pause)

Beloved, I know some of you are tired,
exhausted from trying new things.

Like Simon that day, we acknowledge the
reality of limits and scarcity.

We've only so much to give of our time,
treasure, and talent.

So, there's comfort not only for pastors
in these readings, but for you, too.

But, what if we could also say in our
desperation and exhaustion,
"Yet if you say so, Jesus, I will
let down the nets."

In what ways is Jesus calling you to deeper water?

Like those fishers of people,
you also have unexplored areas of potential that
go far beyond your perceived limited
resources, knowledge or energy.

This call story is not only for pastors
but for everyone. (Pause)

I heard a story once about a pastor who
sat down with the newly formed council
and asked them,
“How do you follow
Jesus in everyday life?”

After a few moments of awkward silence,
one person said, “I have no idea?” :-)

I’ll tell you, even pastors struggle with the question.

I don’t know how to follow Jesus everyday,
all the time... I need your help.

We need Jesus’ help and we required forgiveness
and courage to put out into deeper water. (Pause)

Today, we like Peter, and Isaiah, and Paul
are made clean by the presence of the Holy.

The greatness of God overflows this space,

overflows your home, and pours out
into all places.

God catches everyone so that the nets overflow
and other boats are needed to assist.

It is an awesome task to live in a world like this
and be a Jesus follower.

But, time and time again, God calls the inadequate;
the average; the struggling; the hungry.

And the truth is, no one is ever
good enough, but God is.

So, today we see Peter's humility and say,
"We are like him. Scared to death,
hungry for the word of God and maybe
even willing to put out into deeper
water because Jesus said so."

Peter replied, "Master, we have worked all
night long and have caught nothing.

Yet if you say so,
I will let down the nets.

When they had done this, they caught
so many fish that their nets were

beginning to break.”

But, the account is more than
an abundance of resources, it is much more
than a big catch of fish.

It is about what happens next.

The anglers brought their boats
with the fish
to the shore and they
left everything and followed Jesus.

What a response of gratitude!

They walked away from the mother-load of all catches
and walked into the greatest gift ever imagined.

And it all began because they did
what Jesus suggested.

How great thou art, O Lord!

God chooses people like you to do great things!

Today is that day for us to receive
forgiveness and healing, and also a day
to sing and dance our praises to God as
we too... put out into deep water.

AMEN!