

“Get Out of Here!”

Isaiah 6:1-13; Luke 5:1-11

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, (Feb. 6) 2022

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Jim Wallis, of the inner-city church in Washington, DC called Sojourners, said that he was giving a lecture at a conference on stories of inner-city congregations who had rediscovered their mission and begun to thrive. Many ministers there were inspired at what they heard but some criticized his speech, accused him of looking at the church through rose-colored glasses, and one even implied that he had lied.

Wallis said later, “That’s the reaction I sometimes get from pastors. They are amazed when God wins. Scared to death that Easter just might after all, be true.”

In our gospel lesson today from Luke, we are told that Jesus taught and preached from a boat near the shore because the crowd was so great. The fishermen around him had been washing their nets after a frustrating night of fishing failure. Luke says that these fishermen “caught nothing.” Then, Jesus tells them to try again, and although they are reluctant to take the advice of this teacher and former carpenter, they do try again, and this time have astounding success. They haul in so many fish that their boat begins to sink.

What a great story! And even though it is too soon in Luke or in this season of the church calendar to hear an Easter story, that’s what this is. When we’re finishing up a late night at work, cleaning up and getting ready to call it a day, and

Jesus shows up, we better be prepared for an outbreak of Easter. When we go fishing with Jesus we had better be prepared for a big catch. We are so accustomed to failure and disappointment; we are astounded when the life and triumph of Jesus comes. It's wonderful!

Or is it? The reaction of Peter – the best known of the disciples – to all this abundance-producing power is “Get out of here; I'm a sinner!” Last week they wanted Jesus out of town because of his preaching. Now they want Jesus out of town because of his fishing.

Peter moves from the security of fixed, failed reality – “We've fished all night and have nothing” – into full in the face reality of Jesus. (The key question for all of us, is which reality defines us? Which reality is our default reality?) For many of us, failure and disappointment and even cynicism, define our world and who we are in this world. When something good happens or someone good comes along, we don't trust it or them. But then Jesus comes along, and we find ourselves with a load of success that only a miracle can explain it. Peter knows that being with Jesus changes things. Our reality changes. He goes from calling Jesus, “Master” to “O Lord!” But things are also becoming unmanageable and scary: Peter sees his situation as a lack of faith rather than a lack of fish. And he is not sure he can handle it. So, he blurts out “Get out of here, Jesus,” literally in the Greek, “Get out of my neighborhood!”

Now, I don't know about you, but I admit that it is easier to preach on Good Friday (“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures”), than it is to preach on Easter (“He was raised on the third day in accordance with the

scriptures”). You and I can cite all kinds of sound sociological, psychological, economic, political, and other reasons for death and defeat and despair. But what are we to do with Jesus the Resurrected Christ who rocks the hell out of our dead and dying world?! Though Jesus tells us, “Don’t be afraid.” When he teaches us to fish like him, it’s scary. Get out of here, Jesus.

Jesus calls us to go out to deeper water. He calls us to live more deeply and more daringly. Are we willing? Can we do it? What about you as an individual Christian? What is Jesus calling you to that takes daring trust? I’m talking deep water – are you called to sit down in a hard conversation and reconcile with someone? Is God calling you to change how you and your family devote your time? What if Christ calls you step forward as a leader in this church? What if Jesus calls you to go out to deeper waters and your response is “Jesus, I only have time for quick fishing in the shallows.”

Sometimes the Holy Spirit intrudes in ways we never dreamed. It scares us! Get out of here, Jesus.

We are like those fishermen on that boat. We’re good at what we do. We run a tight ship. We have a good and clean ship, and our nets are in good order. We are smart fishermen, and we are well-trained fishermen, and we know how to be moral and ethical fishermen and we occasionally have symposiums on the theological underpinnings of good fishing, how to recycle fish, developing hybrid-powered fishing boats, and healthy ways to prepare fish. Then Jesus shows up.

What in the world would we do with Jesus Christ led success?!

We are good fishermen and fisherwomen, but Jesus calls us to be fishers of men and women. That we are to go catch people. “Get out of here, Jesus!”

I know we’re still dealing with Covid, and I know we’re putting a lot of emphasis on spiritual growth. But this morning I’m also talking numerical growth. I am talking about looking to the future and about catching people. We have been anchored safely in our harbor for the last couple of years. Maybe it is time to go out in the deep water? Are we ready to launch out and hire and pay the salary of an associate pastor? Are you ready to participate more deeply and fully in the life of the church, especially if we start having more people show up? These are questions about deeper water, and we all know we can’t do any of it on our own. What are we going to do? What is Jesus calling you to do? I don’t know; it’s scary. “Get out of here, Jesus!”

Stanley Hauerwas says that our culture is built on the fear of death. He says that our fear of death explains our health care system, our economy, our military, our government, Gold’s Gym, the self-help, and success industry, and all the rest. I think Stanley is right.

However, I wonder about something else. Some of us build our lives on the fear of Life -- the Life of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. What about our church and churches like ours? Are we afraid of Easter? Are we afraid that Jesus might show up and raise the dead? What if he showed up and raised us to new life? In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.