

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Pastor Mike Schuessler

Text: Luke 5:8

“Simon Peter fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.’”

When I was a kid I learned that the best time to catch fish was before the sun came up. And the best place to catch them was in water not too deep. Peter had learned those things too. He was a professional fisherman. He knew where and when to fish. In our Gospel reading we find that he had worked all night and caught nothing. After teaching the crowds gathered on the shore, Jesus tells Peter to go out into the deep water for a catch. No surprise that a simple carpenter would choose the wrong time and the wrong place to let down the nets. However, Peter obeyed and is surprised by the miraculous catch. His boat is swamped and a second one is filled as well. How happy Peter should have been!

Instead, Peter is afraid. He has begun to realize that this carpenter turned preacher is more than just an ordinary man. Soon he will confess, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” Peter knows that a holy God and sinful people don’t mix. Even his response to Jesus, “Depart from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!” betrays Peter’s self-centeredness. Yet, Jesus bids him, “Don’t be afraid.” The righteous God the Son welcomes Peter with open arms. So too, in our Old Testament reading, Isaiah laments his sinfulness when found in the presence of God the Father. Yet God touches Isaiah and takes away his guilt. Forgiven sinners need not fear God or depart from his presence but remain and enjoy his blessing.

Isaiah and Peter both responded to God’s forgiving love with a desire to serve. They chose to be people who spoke on God’s behalf – reminding people of their sins and of the God who saves them. Jesus told Peter that he would fish for people.

Instead of using nets, Peter would use the message of God’s love to surround people and welcome them into God’s family. Peter left his boat full of fish behind and followed Jesus.

In our second reading, Paul is writing to people who, like Peter, are following Jesus. The Christians at Corinth were interested in God the Holy Spirit and the gifts he gives. Paul suggests that spiritual gifts are for building up the church. As God’s people respond to his love by welcoming others, they turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance. Paul says that he would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue that others cannot understand, benefit from, or say “Amen!” to. For instance, what do you think of this:

“Eis to onoma tou patros, kai tou uiou, kai tou hagiou pneumatos.”

How can you say amen to that if you don’t know what it says? After years of learning to read the New Testament in Greek, I’m able to translate it:

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Amen!)

Today, when people think about Christianity, they may be tempted to say, “It’s Greek to me!” Perhaps they have not heard a clear and consistent message from the Church, or are confused by the presence of so many different denominations. It is to such people that Isaiah and Peter were sent. God sends us too. He sends us to share the truth that sets people free. He sends us to serve others in word and deed. And because deeds can be understood in many ways, we follow Paul’s example and begin with five simple words that we may speak to instruct others: “Jesus paid for your sins.”

God bless us as we live as His forgiven people this week.