

February 9, 2025

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

“Witnessing to What He’s Done”

Luke 5:1-11

Peter is not at all wrong about being unfit for Christ, but he is not disqualified either.

I find it kind of interesting that it is only after the great catch of fish that Peter seems to get a clue about who Jesus truly is. Jesus had been to Peter’s house and miraculously healed his mother-in-law’s fever. After that people started bringing a multitude of ailing people to Jesus and He healed them all or cast out their demons. Presumably Peter is aware of all this. But it’s not until this impossibly large catch of fish that things click and Peter is brought to his knees at Jesus’ feet. Maybe it’s because Peter has heard all the fish stories but this one is actually true!

At the realization that Jesus is, in fact, of God, Peter is humbled, ashamed and alarmed that he is in the presence of what is holy and righteous. *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* Peter is absolutely right. He has absolutely no business being in the presence of God. If this encounter were fair by our human standard of fairness, Peter would stand under wrath because of his many offenses against God.

But of course Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. Of course Jesus speaks the Gospel, *“Do not be afraid.”* Peter is not at all wrong when he says he is a sinful man, but he is not condemned.

But not only that: *“from now on you will be catching men.”* Peter is not at all wrong about being unfit for Christ, but he is not disqualified from Christ’s service either. A sinner like Peter is called to be a disciple, and eventually an apostle, of Jesus. Peter, who is sometimes foolish or proud, who seeks worldly glory, who sometimes thinks he knows better than Jesus how things should work, who not only abandons Jesus but even denies Him three times; this Peter is still commissioned to spread the Gospel of Jesus. He is not disqualified.

I bring this up because a lot of Christians tend to disqualify themselves when it comes to them personally sharing the message of Christ. Yeah, I know, everybody just got uncomfortable. Next to stewardship sermons, evangelism sermons are the most disliked of all. But you can’t get away from this in Holy Scripture. It’s true the apostles had a special calling to proclaim the Gospel as their unique office, but we are all called to share the good news as we’re given opportunity. Peter talks about believers being prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks about your hope in Christ. Paul explains that faith comes through hearing the word of Christ. Jesus Christ speaks of all believers: *“Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* And they are not going to do that if you’re not connecting those good works to Jesus by your words.

But sharing the faith makes people nervous. This understandable. St. Paul says, *“the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,”* so we know people may think we’re stupid and reject us. Nobody likes that. So we, kind of like the way we sometimes rationalize a sin, rationalize why we shouldn’t share our Christian witness. We disqualify ourselves.

We say we don’t know enough. We don’t have the right words. It’s not the right circumstances. It usually boils down to us feeling inadequate to the task...kind of like Peter in the presence of Christ. We consider sharing Christ a calling that is too sacred and holy for us, beyond us, so we disqualify ourselves. *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful person.”*

Jesus has qualified you. It's really that simple. In His Word, His Baptism, His Supper, Jesus has said to you the same thing the seraphim said to Isaiah when calling him as a prophet in a vision, "Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." You stand forgiven; therefore you are qualified for witness.

You see, you don't have to be able to convince anyone of the truth of Holy Scripture. You don't have to be able to answer all the questions somebody might ask you about the Bible. You don't have to know every book of the Bible, every story, every theological nuance and challenge. It is called "your Christian witness" for a reason. All you really need to be able to do is voice what you know Jesus has done for you.

You know the basics—it's all there in the simple creeds we confess together each Sunday. I know God created me and all that exists. I know I fall short of His good design for this creation and thus am a sinner deserving only punishment. I know God is love, and out of His love He sent His Son, who mercifully and selflessly entered into our humanity, then suffered and died to pay for my offenses. I know He rose to life again and is my Lord, My King ruler for all eternity. I know I will live forever in His glory, and that life is mine today, so I try to live it to His glory, failing miserably and being forgiven daily.

That's not high theology. That's just our faith. And sure, folks may have tough questions and even nasty challenges. And you might not have good answers or convincing arguments. But you can say, "By God's gift of the Holy Spirit I know it's true. I am saved."

You see, you're perfectly qualified not because of you, but because of what Christ has done for you.

St. Peter was a fisherman, and from his words to Jesus I've got to think that maybe he wasn't the most honorable kind of fisherman. But Jesus took him, commissioned him, and sent him to proclaim the Gospel. And remember, he even messed that up. Remember that St. Paul had to rebuke him once for letting his fears of how he looked in the eyes of some Jews mess with his ministry to the Gentiles. His witness even after Christ's ascension was not perfect.

It doesn't matter. Our witness doesn't have to be perfect. In fact, it cannot be perfect because we are still plagued by the fallen nature clinging to our flesh. Nevertheless, Jesus has qualified us to bear witness simply because we stand redeemed by His blood, blessed by His gifts through the Holy Spirit, and members of His kingdom.

Don't disqualify yourself from sharing the Gospel because of your fears and shortcomings. Look to the Savior whose work has qualified you for life in His kingdom. See those who have yet to receive His love in faith. Then pray for and look for opportunities to share not how much you know about God and Christ and the Bible, but simply what Jesus has done for you.

Amen.