

Jesus clearly commands his Church: go and tell the good news of Jesus to all the world! As he says in Matthew chapter 28: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And as he says in Mark chapter 16: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." So, Christians, our mission is clear. God sends us in the world to tell all the world of him, to speak of the hope that is in us, to proclaim to everyone around us the mighty works of God. And Jesus' command is not just for specific people in the Church either, as if he was only giving it to some and not to all. Rather, the whole Church is sent, sent to carry forward the Great Commission, sent to win the whole world for Jesus Christ. And Christians, this is our business until Jesus returns on the Last Day. May the Lord bless and carry forward this mighty work in his name!

But we need to ask ourselves: why do we go? What is it that drives us to carry out this command? If we're doing it for Jesus, that is well and good. That's what we should be doing. But is that the reason that we go? Are we driven forward out of love for Christ? Or do we have some other reason, something else which moves us to do this? That's the question that we need to consider from our Gospel reading for this morning.

And Simon Peter in our Gospel reading gives us the answer to that question, or at least gives us something to compare ourselves against. So pay close attention to what it is that he is doing and what happens to him. Put yourself in his boat on that morning when Jesus came to him. Because on that morning, Christians, Peter had just come in from a night of fishing. Nighttime was the time you went out to go fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Because Peter and fishermen like him used nets which formed a kind of wall in the water. The fish would swim into it and get caught, and that's how they would take them. But these nets only worked when the fish couldn't actually see the net. In other words, when it was dark at night. And so in the morning, then, after all the fish had been caught, they would take up their nets, sail into the shore, take in the catch that they had taken, and then they would spend at least part of the morning mending and fixing and washing the nets in preparation for the night to come. And that's what Peter was doing that morning. He was fixing his nets in anticipation of what was to come. But he was a little bit disappointed and probably not a little irritated, because on the previous night they had caught nothing. Nothing at all. It's not like Peter was a poor man. After all, he owned the boat and he owned the nets. He was at least somewhat well-to-do. But to catch nothing was a financial blow to him. It would've been better to catch even a small amount than to take nothing at all. And so on that morning, with money on his mind, and more than a little irritated, he set about the work of washing his nets.

But as he was working on those nets, something unusual happened to him. Jesus got into his boat and asked him to put out a little ways from the land. Jesus wanted to use his boat as a kind of floating pulpit to proclaim the Word of God, to teach the crowd. And Peter agreed to this. It's not like he was going to go fishing anyway. And if nothing else, he could continue working on his nets while he listened to Jesus. He'd have something to think about as he went about the tedious work. And so that's what Peter did. They sailed out a little ways from the land, and Jesus began to teach the crowd, to speak of the kingdom of God. And as Peter listened that day, he heard something he had never heard before. He heard Jesus speaking of the kingdom. He came to see Jesus as something more than just an ordinary man. Peter knew that no one had ever spoken like Jesus. And his heart began to change as he listened on that day.

But then something even more strange happens. After Jesus finishes his sermon, he says to Peter in verse 4 of our reading: "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch." Don't wait for night, he says. Go out and start fishing right now! But everything about this request went against everything that Peter knew. It went against his better judgment. It went against all of his experience. He had probably been a fisherman ever since he was a young boy working for his father. Years and years of experience said this wasn't going to work. Years and years of experience said that this was a bad idea. You just don't catch fish during the day. They see the net and simply swim away. Peter could have said: "I know my business, Jesus, and you know yours. So you just stick to what you know, and let me do my job!" What could a carpenter possibly know about fishing, anyway? But Peter didn't do that. He says to Jesus in verse 5: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Peter was willing to do what he thought was foolish because of a growing trust in Jesus. It didn't make any sense to him to let down the nets in the middle of the day like that, but Jesus was somebody that he needed to listen to, even if he didn't quite understand why. And so that's what he did. They went back out into the deep part of the lake, and they let down the nets.

But now something miraculous happens: the nets become filled with fish! They are practically breaking with the fish. When Peter least expected it, he caught the most fish that he had ever caught at one time in his entire life. There were so many fish that two whole boats began to sink under the weight! It was a tremendous miracle indeed. And Peter could see what it was right away. He knew exactly what this meant. This man was no ordinary man. The power of God was at work here. This miraculous catch of fish could only come from the hand of God! So Peter fell down before Jesus, confessing his sins. Peter knew that God was near. But Jesus lifted him up, and he set him to do something new. Jesus says in verse 10 of our reading: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Peter would no longer be a fisherman bringing in his catch of dead fish every day, but a fisher of men sent to catch men alive and bring them into the kingdom of God. Peter would be working for Jesus now!

But at this point, perhaps the most marvelous thing of all happens. Verse 11 says: "When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him." Think about what that means, Christians. Peter left behind his boats, boats that he owned, boats that he had worked in for many years, boats he had probably inherited from his father. Peter left behind the nets, not even bothering to fix them for the coming night. Peter left behind that great catch of fish, a catch of fish which would probably have made him rich for several months at least, if not longer. He left it all behind in order to follow Jesus. He was not fearful of what might happen in the days ahead. He was not worried about the money and the boats and the work that he left behind. But he followed Jesus to serve him in willing obedience, trusting him fully, and Jesus made him a catcher of men.

And Christians, Jesus gives the same command to his Church today, to each and every one of us. We are all called to be catchers of men. And I know that we want to listen to him. If we don't, after all, that's a problem. We need to repent of it and turn back towards Jesus. But I know that we know that mission work is something that we should be doing. It's why we have a mission donation, after all. It's why we give to missions. It's why we want to reach out, why we want to call others to Jesus, and so forth. These are all good things. These are things that Jesus has called us to do. But why do we want to do it? What is it that is driving us to do it? Are we like Peter, so that we want to do these things out of a love for Jesus, so that nothing else in the world matters in

comparison? Or do we do it out of fear, especially the fear of what might happen in the days ahead? Do we want to say that we need to bring others in because we're a small church? We need to keep this church going. Do we say that we need to bring others in because finances are getting tight? We need to keep this church afloat. Do we say that we need to bring others in because we're getting older, and it'd be nice to have some new faces around here? Do we end up keeping one eye on the boats and the nets and the fish, even as we want to follow Jesus? Christians, that is not good. Fear should not be the reason that we do these things. Fear should not drive us to tell others of Jesus.

Rather, it is love that should move us, love that should drive us to tell the good news. Not only a love for others, but above all a love for Jesus. Because when we have that love, Christians, we will see that there is no need to be worried about the boats and the nets and the fish. Jesus will care for us in those things too. Even if they go away entirely, it's going to be okay, because Jesus is still the Lord of his Church. Jesus will guide us into all the world. And his Word will not return empty. It will do exactly what he has sent it to do. And he has given us his Spirit to grow the Church, even from the very beginning. And Jesus has promised to be with us even to the very end of this age. And more than this, Christians, Jesus has even promised that he will give us the Spirit to give us the very words that we should say. So there is no need to fret and to worry about messing it up. God is at work within you, and God will bless this work. And he will carry it forward as we go in his name.

So go, Christians. Go and tell the world about Jesus. Let the joy of knowing Jesus lead you to share that same joy with others. Trust him as Peter once did. Follow him without fear. So make that phone call that you've been putting off. Say something to that friend that you've always been meaning to say something to. Tell the person in need of the love of Jesus even as you care for them. Tell all your friends and neighbors and the whole community of Jesus Christ. Go and tell the good news of Jesus, because he has called you to be catchers of men. And he will guide you and strengthen you and bless you as you do, and he will be with you always through it all.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us to see that the fields of the world are white for harvest, open our mouths to speak of you to all who are around us, so that many may come to know you by faith and be saved; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.