

Luke 5:1-11

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

1st Corinthians 15: 1-11

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain.

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

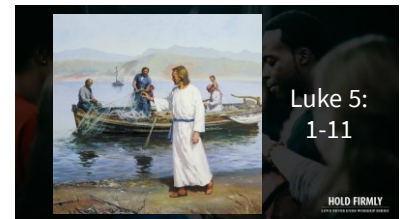
⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.



Welcome to week 5 of our worship series, “Love Never Ends”. We began with a reminder of Jesus’ baptism and of our baptism – of that moment when God said, ‘With you I am well pleased’. Next, we spent two weeks in Paul’s writings around the varieties of gifts given by the Holy Spirit and around how those gifts are meant to bring unity and to build up the body of Christ. Last week we read and learned from ‘the love chapter’. Today we move on from the greatest gifts of all – love – to reclaim the call to hold on firmly to our faith. We will first turn to the gospel of Luke to revisit the call of the first disciples as a means to remember our own ‘come to Jesus’ moment. Then, turning to 1st Corinthians 15, we will hear Paul’s words of encouragement to the Corinthian church. This call is a call back to when and where their faith started. We too will be reminded of our faith roots. As we prepare to do so, let us pray...

Turn with me to Luke 5 as we begin this morning. Jesus has been in ministry just a short time. Even so, word has spread – the healings and the incredible teachings have drawn large numbers of people to see and hear Jesus. As our passage begins, we see that a large crowd has gathered, almost pushing Jesus back into the Lake of

Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. Jesus then notices two boats on the edge of the water. In verse 3 we read, *“He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore.*



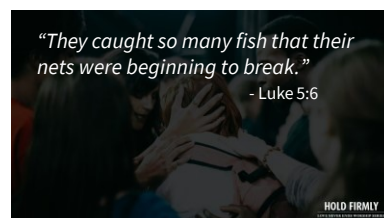
Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.” We assume that as Jesus taught, Simon and his companions continued to tend to their nets, preparing for the next day of fishing.

There is a contrast here between the crowd and Simon and his fellow fishermen. The crowd was eager to hear Jesus. The fishermen were eager to finish up their work so they could head home to rest. There were no fish to bring to market to sell; it had been a slow night of fishing. Probably reluctantly, Simon does take Jesus out into the water so that he can teach the crowd. When Jesus had finished teaching the crowd, he invites Simon to put out into deeper water. Simon offers up a meager protest: *“Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”* If you say so. I really do not want to, but if you say so Jesus. Simon Peter is where many of us have been, where many of us are over and over.

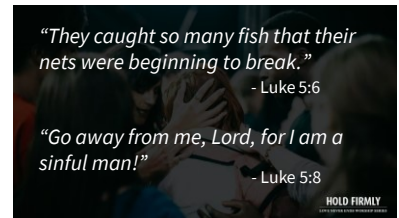
Peter did not really want to hear Jesus’ voice, much less his message. He just wanted to pack up and head home after a long night of fishing. An unsuccessful night to boot. But Jesus interrupts Peter and his business associates. Put out into deeper water.

Peter probably grew up like most of us – going to synagogue as a young boy, learning the Torah. We went to church as kids. Sunday school was probably part of our early faith journey as well. We learned the stories, we understood what faith was. Growing up we were surrounded by family and other caring adults who nurtured us and our faith. We heard about and felt God’s love all around us. Like Peter we knew who God was. He had likely heard about this Jesus. And then one day we realized that this faith – well, it was the faith of our parents, of our pastor, of our Sunday school teachers. It was not our faith. And maybe we were like Peter in this way too. Life began to happen and next thing we knew we were immersed in work or school or sports and God was someplace out there. At some point, maybe like Peter, we found ourselves struggling to make a living, working day after day, just trying to get by. And then suddenly this Jesus is standing there in our boat. We try and keep our head down, minding our own business, just tending to the nets. And then he asks us to push out into the deep water.

Peter and probably Andrew let down their nets, just as Jesus said. In verse 6 we get the results: *“they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.”* They caught so many fish they have to ask James and John to come out and help. So many fish that the boats begin to sink. This is probably when they really heard Jesus’ voice for the first time that day. Where were you when you heard Jesus’ voice really for the first time? When was it that you heard Jesus speaking to you, speaking into your life for the first time? We all have that moment, that time and place when Jesus became more than our parents’ faith, more than a story in the Bible.

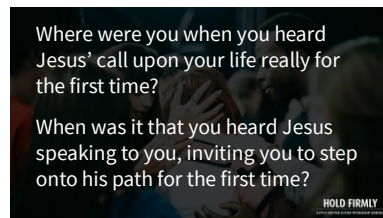


When Peter realizes just what is going on, he falls down at Jesus' knees and declares, *"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"* In the lectionary readings this week we see a similar response from Isaiah in chapter 6. As he is in the presence of God and the seraphs worshipping God, Isaiah says, *"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips."* Isaiah thinks he is totally unworthy to be in God's presence. This overwhelming experience is almost too much for Isaiah to take in. We too can find ourselves feeling like Isaiah did at times, questioning our place in God's presence and goodness. At times I choose to be distant from God, to walk in darkness and sin. Even then God has intervened in my life. In those moments of grace and mercy and love, I have wondered why God would have anything to do with me when I was walking in ways displeasing to God. And yet God does. God's love always reached out to us.



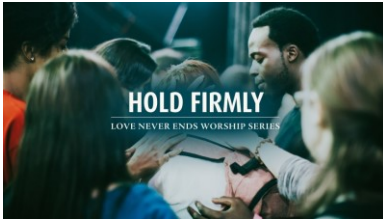
In our gospel lesson, Peter and his companions are also totally overwhelmed by what has just happened. This carpenter turned prophet has just performed a miracle, bringing the presence of God right there into their boats. The feeling of being unworthy in that holy presence is something we have all felt before. And yet at times God shows up in our lives – even when we are not walking or living as we should or when we have gotten too busy or too wrapped up in ourselves to have time for God. Over and over, God continues to show up. Jesus then encourages Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen, telling them not to be afraid, telling them that they will now fish for people. Peter and Andrew, James and John, they bring their boats ashore and *"they left everything and followed him."* So compelling was the voice of Jesus and the presence of the divine in their boat that all they could do was follow.

Jesus' voice can be compelling in our lives too. We have sensed or heard the call to come and follow. So I ask, where were you when you heard Jesus' call upon your life really for the first time? When was it that you heard Jesus speaking to you, inviting you to step onto his path for the first time?



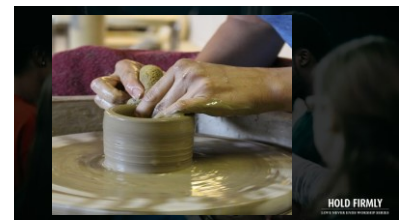
As we continue, turn with me to 1st Corinthians 15. As Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Corinthian church, he asks these same questions really. In verse 1 he begins, *“Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand.”* Where and when did you first hear Jesus speak to you? Remember when you heard the good news, received the good news? Remember and stand firm in that faith.

Paul is calling this church that is struggling to get along to go back and remember where it all began, to recapture those initial feelings and emotions, those first thoughts and decisions. For those at odds with each other, Paul invites them to go back to what they first learned together, to rekindle that spark that drew one and all into a relationship not just with Jesus but with one another. This is a good reminder for us too. At times we can find ourselves at odds with others in the church and once in a while we are even at odds with ourselves, as we battle with temptation and sin. And we can also find ourselves at odds with our faith as the flesh within struggles with what our faith tells us against what the world tells us. We too are in process. In verse 2 Paul writes about the faith *“through which you are being saved.”* – are being saved. Faith is an ongoing process, an action that is worked out again and again in the life and in the heart of the believer.



To the church in Corinth and to us today, Paul tells us to remember and to hold firmly to message that he proclaimed – the message of salvation and eternal life. To add detail, in verses 3 through 7, Paul recounts the steps that Jesus walked through to bring them and us our salvation. Paul reminds them that Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose on the third day. He also reminds them that the risen Christ appeared to many different people and then, *“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”* There is a humility in Paul, in these words, in the words that come next. Paul admits his failures, remembering the time when he was the chief persecutor of the church. Because of this, Paul wonders if he is even fit to be called an apostle. But it always goes back to Jesus, always back to Christ. Faith always centers on the straight-forward story the centers on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith always centers on Jesus, the person through which we are being saved.

This idea that those in the church in Corinth and that we are a work in progress is essential for the unity that Paul desires for the church. To those that think they are better than everyone else, Paul says: you are a work in progress. To those who think they are not as good as they should be, Paul says: you are a work in progress. To those who find themselves someplace between sinner and saint, Paul says: you are a work in progress. Each of us, all of us, are works in progress, each evolving and becoming what the Lord wants to shape and refine us to be. To flesh this out, Paul shares his own story.



Paul tells of how the persecutor of the church was saved by grace. By the grace of God Saul became Paul. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit Paul would become a great apostle, bringing Christ to many, many people. Paul too had his first moment when he met Jesus. Walking the road to Damascus to arrest more Christians, Christ came to see Saul. Paul can answer the questions: Where were you when you heard Jesus' call upon your life really for the first time? When was it that you heard Jesus speaking to you, inviting you to step onto his path for the first time? There was this moment in Paul's life when everything changed. Everything, even his name. The change came through grace. Like you and me, Paul could not earn it. Like you and me, Paul did not deserve it. Maybe Paul would not have even chosen himself to receive this grace. He was too filled with hate and anger to ever choose himself to encounter this Jesus that interrupted his life as Jesus stepped into his boat. Saul was hard and rigid in his faith. Like Peter in his boat that day, Paul thought he was perfectly happy and content doing what he was doing. And then Jesus interrupted his life. The potter reached out and began to reshape Saul, to refine Saul into Paul.



This grace at work in Paul's life, this grace at work in our lives, this grace gives us the power to stand firm in our faith and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

The power and authority that Paul claimed was fueled by the grace of God within him. Returning to the call of Isaiah, God's grace is what drew him in, what helped him move past his feelings of unworthiness. After Isaiah's profession of sin, one of the seraph's takes a coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips, declaring that "*your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.*" Today as we confess and repent, we too will experience forgiveness and restoration. Through communion we are made whole.

Through God's love and mercy, we are restored to right relationship with God. From that place, we too can claim this same power and authority to stand firm in our faith because it comes not from ourselves but from Christ living in us. This relationship, this indwelling Spirit, causes the image of God to shine out, to radiate forth from us, to be a part of all of our living. Paul is calling the Corinthians to remember and to hold onto this faith, to stand firm in the power of Christ. He encourages them to move back into the relationship that first brought them into the realm of the Holy Spirit power that now equips them to walk in faith. Paul invites them to hold firmly to the faith that Jesus still is who he said he was when they first met Christ. Paul invites them to hold firmly to that first encounter, to those first moments when they felt on fire for Christ, to that moment when they came to believe and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Hold firm – but don't stay there.

Remember, you are being saved, says Paul. Remember that you are a work in progress. Remember you too are clay in God's hands. Faith is not a static thing. There is not a place you reach and say, "I have arrived. I am the best Christian I am ever going to be!" While the good news does not change, our understanding of it certainly changes. The way we apply the good news to our life changes. The way we experience and live out our relationship with Jesus changes and evolves. As a work in progress, we ask questions, we wrestle with our faith. As a work in progress, we fail, and we confess and repent and begin anew our walk with an intensified effort. As we experience and live out our relationship with Jesus, we witness to the good news that transformed our life, hoping and praying that this same good news will transform those we engage in our daily life, for they too are a work in progress. While we hold firmly to the faith we profess, we also seek to help others begin to grasp onto Jesus.

Like those who first nurtured us, those who first shared their faith with us, we too become sharers of the faith, helping others to begin a walk with Jesus. Day by day may we hold firmly to our faith, proclaiming Jesus to others for the transformation of their lives and of the world. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When have you felt unworthy of being in the Lord's presence? How did God move you past that? In what ways did your faith grow or mature?
- 2) *Pray*. How is God calling you to respond to the call in your life? Please take time to pray for God to reveal the next steps of your response.
- 3) *Study*. Read (or re-read) Isaiah 6:1-8. When and how has God prepared you to respond as Isaiah did? How might the church partner with you in your response?