

## Let's Go Fishin'

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, February 14, 2010)

Isaiah 6:1-8 <sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

Luke 5:1-11 <sup>1</sup>Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “**Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.**” <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>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.**” <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

I would like to challenge everyone here this morning to join me in launching a new evangelistic campaign here at Peace Church. We are going to go into some of the toughest neighborhoods in Greensboro and bring some of the most difficult people to Christ. Are you ready? Are you willing? Or are you squirming in your seats, wondering what in the world the preacher has in mind today, or maybe you are thinking, “I hope there will be enough others volunteer so he doesn’t ask me,” you know, the old “let somebody else do it” attitude.

Well, if you really don’t want to be a part of a new evangelism effort, you are in good company. Not only Jeremiah, who we spoke about last week, but Moses, Isaiah, Paul, even Peter all had their own way of saying, “No thank you, God. Please ask somebody else.”

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and told him to lead his people to freedom, Moses answered, “**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?**” God was very patient with Moses. Moses wanted to know who he should tell the people had sent him, he wanted proof to show the people, he protested that he wasn’t a good public speaker, and every time God provided an answer that eliminated the excuse. Moses kept giving excuses and finally said, “**O my Lord, please send someone else.**” Sound familiar? But what happened? Exodus, chapter 4 tells us that God did not take no for an answer, and Moses went.

When God told Jeremiah that he was appointed to be a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah answered, “**Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.**” Today we have people who might say they are too young, or not trained, or too busy, or too old. God didn’t accept Jeremiah’s answer either. When God called Isaiah to be a prophet, Isaiah answered as if he wanted to run away, saying, “**Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.**” God sent an angel with a hot coal from the altar fires to take care of Isaiah’s protest, and again, God refused to take no for an answer and sent Isaiah out to ministry.

We all know how Paul fought becoming a Christian, not just turning away from God but actively persecuting Christians, so that God had to dramatically get his attention on the road to Damascus.

In our lesson this morning, Peter asked Jesus to go away. There is something that is both frightening and humorous here. Peter knew he had encountered God in the person of Jesus. His response was a little like Isaiah – “I am not worthy.” But the funny part is that he asked Jesus to leave, to get out of the boat, right there in the middle of the lake and go away. Remember, they were in deep water, we might even say that Peter must have felt in over his head, and he asked Jesus to leave! Well, maybe that wasn’t such a bad idea – after all, the boat was sinking, but you have to wonder, did Peter expect Jesus to get out of the boat and walk on water? That did happen later, you know, but I don’t think Peter was ready for it at this time.

We might conclude from our lesson that immediately Peter left everything and followed Jesus. But the Gospels actually record three times that Jesus called him, three different ways. The important thing is that Peter did follow; Paul was converted, too; Jeremiah and Isaiah became God’s prophets and Moses became the most revered of the leaders of Israel.

I don’t think it is God’s plan for me to lead the captives out of Egypt, or to be a prophet to the nations or take the Gospel to the Gentiles – but I don’t know. None of us really know what else God might have planned for us. But we are all called to follow, and to catch people for Him, as he told Peter. We often forget about that part – catching people for Jesus. That is every bit as important as following Jesus, although we might not necessarily be bringing them in right away. You might need to call three times, as Jesus called Peter, or even 300 times. But you have to start.

Catching people — for good instead of for evil — sometimes begins with catching them off guard. Lucretia Coffin Mott, a Quaker reformer who campaigned for women’s rights and abolition of slavery, was involved in an anti-slavery meeting that turned ugly. Thugs came and broke up the gathering and attacked some of the speakers as they left the hall. Lucretia Mott told the man who had accompanied her to escort some of the other ladies who were alone and who were really frightened, out of the tumult. Her escort protested, “But who will look after you?” She said, “This gentleman,” turning to one of the roughest-looking thugs in the mob. She lay her hand on his arm. “He will see me safely through,” she explained. The fellow was so astonished that he did as she requested and escorted her respectfully through the crowd to safety.

That reminds me of the more modern story of the lady who came out from shopping, her children screaming, only to discover that she had locked the keys in her car. She just didn’t know what to do, and as she rested her head on the car, with tears flowing, she prayed, “Dear God, send an angel to help me out of this predicament.”

Just then a man came up behind her, saw her crying, and asked, “Can I help you?” She explained her situation and the man said, “Oh, I can take care of that.” He pulled a wire coat hanger out of the bag he was carrying and within seconds had the door unlocked.

The lady was so pleased and thanked him several times, “Thank you for coming and helping me; you are such a nice man.”

The man replied, “No, I am not a nice man. I was just released from prison yesterday. I just finished serving 5 years for breaking and entering and auto theft.”

At which point the lady bowed her head again and prayed, “Thank you God, for sending a professional to help me.”

We can laugh, but can’t you see that both of these experiences are a form of evangelism, helping a person move away from a bad past, encouraging them to do good, helping them move toward a better life. This you can do. You can find opportunities to open doors for a person to do something good, to be a better person.

But you also need to go to the next step, which is bringing people to Christ. It starts by connecting with people. You won’t catch many fish until you go out into the deep water. You can’t catch fish until you throw out the net or drop the line. And you don’t catch people for Christ unless you connect, just like the line connects you with the fish.

Remember, Jesus asked Peter and James and John to follow him. And he promised they would become fishers of men, to use Mark’s phrase. Following Jesus is not just believing, and following Jesus is not just becoming a part of a Christian fellowship, but there is fishing involved. Connect with others and bring them in. Or think about those to whom you are already connected, maybe even family – do they know Christ? Do they attend worship faithfully? Now is the time to bring others to Christ. Invite them to join us in the body of Christ. Let’s go fishin! Let’s bring them in.