

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who 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 from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began 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 full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

CHRIST THROUGH US!

What are you good at? What is your special skill? Your hidden talent? Can you touch your nose with your tongue? Just wanted to see if there was someone who would try it.

Through Peter

Peter was good at fishing. Peter was a professional, fishing was what Peter along with his buddies James and John did for a living. Jesus was good at talking. The Gospel starts, *"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God."* But instead of telling us what the teaching lesson was about, Luke the evangelist under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course, decides to share with us the after Bible class conversation.

"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Jesus said to Simon. And Simon answered, *"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything."* If this conversation were happening today, we might hear Peter saying, "Master, stay in your lane." "You are the teacher. Teaching is what your good at. Stay in your teaching lane" "I am the fisherman. Fishing is what I'm good at. Let me drive in the fishing lane." And then I imagine there was this long pregnant pause here. I imagine Peter waiting for Jesus to say, "You're right, Peter. You're the fisherman. I'm the teacher. Don't put out into the deep and don't let down the nets for a catch." And when that response doesn't come Peter says, *"But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

And who's the expert fisherman now? Jesus is the expert fisherman. Jesus knows where the fish are at and Jesus knows how to get the fish where he wants them. Jesus is all-knowing and Jesus is all-powerful. Peter should want to partner up with Jesus. What a fishing business that would be! But in that moment, Peter realizes he wouldn't and couldn't bring anything of value to this partnership on his own. *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* Peter says. What was Peter afraid of? Was Peter afraid Jesus could see under the surface of his heart like Jesus could see the fish under the surface of the water? Was Peter afraid of a partnership with Jesus where he, that is Peter, wouldn't bring all that much to the table? What was Peter afraid of? What are you afraid of? Our fears don't always make sense, but how awesome it is how God tells us again and again, "Don't be afraid." The Bible is a big book. *Audible* can read the Bible for you in 75 hours. You might speed read long lists of names or ordinances, but don't speed read, "Don't be afraid." Soak up this command in your mind. Let this command echo in your heart. Don't be afraid. Jesus doesn't distance himself from Peter, but comes closer saying, "Don't stay in his fishing lane, but to come over into my teaching lane. The exact words of Jesus, *"From now on you will fish for people."*

Of course as sinners typically do, Peter will go from feeling guilty about himself to feeling good about himself. Peter will easily be lured into a conversation about who the greatest disciple is and even make the prideful boast to Jesus, "Even if all the other disciples fall away, I never will." Yes, Peter will fall fast and deep into the error that Peter through Peter will fish for people. After his resurrection, Jesus will patiently rinse and repeat this miracle for Peter so that when 3,000 souls are converted on the great day of Pentecost and when the Gentile Cornelius and all those in his house are baptized in the name of Christ Peter knows it's not Peter through Peter that disciples are made, but Christ through Peter. Christ through Peter has done great things.

Through WELS

And for the last 175 years Christ has been doing great work through WELS, through the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod too. Today there are over 1,200 congregations in our country. These WELS congregations

operate over 250 elementary schools and more than 350 early childhood centers as well as 29 area Lutheran High Schools, 2 preparatory high schools dedicated for the singular purpose of training called workers, Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In addition to what has been done stateside, WELS has a mission presence in nearly fifty countries throughout the world. Christ has done great work through WELS. And today WELS is in year three of a ten-year plan to open 100 new missions of the next ten years. As of today, we have 28 of those new missions, one of them is in the San Tan Valley and the missionary is our own Nathan Savage, who will talk about that mission two weeks from today. Our Bible class in the Fellowship Hall today and next Sunday will cover more closely this great work of Christ through WELS as well as some of the challenges WELS has faced, but let's spend some time this morning talking about YOU.

Through YOU

You are in a WELS church today so you have benefitted from the Wisconsin Synod. Maybe you were baptized in a WELS congregation. Maybe you were catechized in a WELS School or as an adult and became a communicant member of a WELS congregation. Christ through WELS has blessed you, but the same error of thinking that was held by Peter on the shore of Lake Gennesaret can also be held by YOU in the pews and chairs of Grace Lutheran Church. The error of, "Stay in your lane, WELS pastors and teachers!" "You are the professionals." You do the talking, the preaching and teaching. "We as WELS members will come and listen. We will give generous offerings. And we will drop off our children for instruction, but we are going to leave the Bible talking to the professionals.

Might this be a reason why our Wisconsin synodical members have gone down in number in 34 of the last 35 years? Is this why in spite of all our Christian education for children, young confirmands and adults and leaving our Lutheran churches. Yes, we have 1,200 congregations, but more than 500 of them average less than 50 in worship. By the numbers, our synod is dying and it's not exactly good news that our church body is dying more slowly than other church bodies.

But what about YOU? That's what Jesus asked of Simon Peter at the end of John chapter 6. Verse 66 and following, *"66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.'* Christ through YOU. Yes, faithful worship attendance and time in the Word is helpful. Yes, generous offerings so that worker training and mission work as well as our local ministry can be appropriately funded is help. And yes, bringing your children to church for Bible instruction is helpful too.

But don't you hear Jesus saying, "Come into my talking lane. Come into my teaching lane." Don't be afraid. No one is really good at teaching God's Word. And the ones that are good at teaching God's Word won't make a difference without God's working anyway. So don't be afraid. You will make mistakes. You will feel guilty and you will feel good about yourself. And you will be humbled. And you will realize that it's not you through your fishing for people and making disciples. It's Christ through YOU.

So give it a try in our Fellowship Hall. Sit across from someone and talk to them. You can talk about their day or their week. You can talk about their family or their work. You can talk about anything. And hopefully our teachers are also giving you opportunities in class to talk about the Bible and about your faith. That is what happens in our Grace Groups. You can be a part of our Grace Groups, but if you are driving home in a car with someone you are already part of a Grace Group. Let a passenger ask the questions on the back of the worship folders and all the other questions that come across your mind and talk about them. Talk about them with your children. Don't be afraid. You don't need to be great. You don't need to be good. Christ is great. Christ is good. Christ worked through Peter. Christ has worked through WELS. And Christ works through YOU and me too. Don't be afraid. Amen.