



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

FEBRUARY 10, 2019
THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Caught by God Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11

It was a beautiful day by the Sea of Galilee (or Gennesaret as it was known locally). I like to imagine that it was a day like last Thursday—cool in the morning until the sun burned off the clouds and warmed the air into a bright and beautiful day.

Jesus stood near the shore surrounded by a crowd of people urging him to speak. But where could he sit so that people could see and hear him? He looked out over the water and got lost for a moment as he watched the sunlight skip on the ripples in the water. It looked so peaceful out there. The sound of oars hitting wood brought him back and he noticed how busy the shore was. Fishermen were coming in from a night on the water and many of them were already cleaning and storing their gear.

He had an idea! He walked to the water and approached a couple of boats that were pulled up on the sand. “How was the fishing last night?” he asked the back of a man who was busily picking debris out of a net. “Lousy!” came the reply. “I wonder,” Jesus asked, “if you would let me use your boat for a while? These folks want me to teach and your boat would be perfect so that everyone could hear and . . . well, I really enjoy being on the water.”

The man turned around to see who was talking to him and recognized Jesus. “You’re the teacher everyone is talking about. They say that you speak with authority and are able to heal people. You want to use my boat? Certainly. Climb aboard and we’ll push out a ways.”

The man signaled to his brother Andrew to put the nets away and together they rowed the boat offshore twenty yards or so. They dropped anchor and Jesus called to the crowd on the shore to sit and listen. He spoke of long-held hopes and deep needs. He shared old sorrows and new joys. He reminded them of the goodness of God whose love endures forever and whose faithfulness lasts through every generation. He ended with a blessing and the crowd began to thin away.

Not knowing what to say, the fishermen sat in silence waiting for Jesus to tell them he was ready to go back to shore. Jesus turned and looked in their direction, out over the sea. He breathed deeply and sighed. "What a perfect day!" he exclaimed. "Let's go out further and fish some more!" Stunned, the brothers looked at each other. "Teacher," Simon said, "we fished all night long and didn't catch a thing!" He paused when he saw the eagerness on Jesus' face. "But, if you want to fish, we will give it a try!" They rowed out into the deep of the lake and let down their nets. In no time at all, they felt the nets starting to pull, and when they tried to haul them in, there were so many fish that they were afraid the nets would tear. As Simon, Andrew, and Jesus held onto their catch, they signaled for their partners, James and John, to come out and help. Soon the other pair of brothers arrived and they, too, filled their nets with a huge catch of fish.

Stunned by what had happened, Simon fell on his knees in the boat in front of Jesus and said, "Teacher, truly you are holy. I am a sinful man. You don't need to be near me." Jesus grabbed him by the shoulders, laughed, and said, "Get up, Simon. You have nothing to fear. If you think this catch is something, just wait. From now on, I'll have you catching people!"

I suppose that if you walked around in the seaside village of Capernaum later that day, you would have heard people talk about the things Jesus said that morning from his pulpit on the water. All of the fishermen in town would have been marveling over the amazing catch that Simon and his crew had after everyone else had hung up their nets to dry and gone home. But the real news, which escaped all but a few people, is that the big catch of the day was Simon. God caught Simon in the net of his wonder and love!

That what God always does. He caught Abram and Sarai with the promise of a new adventure and progeny more numerous than anything they could imagine. He caught Jacob sneaking back home after cheating his family for his own gain and wrestled him back into his favor. He caught Isaiah by the awe of his majesty and snared Joseph and Mary with the immediacy of his love. As God walking among us, Jesus caught lepers who were quarantined to the edges of community, tax collectors who were the scourge of society, and prostitutes who bore the shame of abuse and oppression. God caught people like you and me and Simon, but not in a net or cage. He caught them all with his love and grace.

What happens when God catches you? As predicted, Simon and his brother Andrew, along with their partners John and James, became Jesus'

disciples. There was no revolutionary change of personality. Simon continued to be rough around the edges and never really lost his brash and boisterous character. Jesus had to patiently and not-so-patiently correct Simon at times. He gave him the new name of Peter which means rock, but sometimes it suggested that Peter was more dense than steadfast! Nevertheless, Simon Peter, for all of his brutishness, insecurity, and unfaithfulness, became the point person for the new community of faith known as the Church. When God caught Simon, it was a big catch!

When God catches us, it's a big deal too! A week or so ago, I heard a story that will not leave me alone. A youth minister told of a Sunday School class that taught him a lot about how God works. One morning, a young man who had never been to the church before came into their youth class. He sat in the back of the room, didn't participate at all, and looked like he wanted to be anywhere but in Sunday School . . . which was true. His name was Braxton. The youth minister eventually learned that Braxton was a young man who was not, let us say, conventional. He enjoyed music of the punk rock variety. He wore clothes that were anything but "Sunday casual." His appearance was dark and dangerous looking, probably a lot like his life. He and his friends experimented with drugs and got into trouble. In desperation, his mother insisted that it was time for a change and that Braxton would have to start going to church. She didn't care which church, but he needed to get his life on track. A friend of his heard about his plight and invited him to her church which happened to be the one he walked into on a particular Sunday morning.

Braxton came for several weeks but always sat at the back and never participated in any way. During this time, the group was learning about Jesus and how he related to various people he met on his travels—the lepers and tax collectors and prostitutes and fishermen—the ordinary people of Galilee. One Sunday after the class was over, Braxton came up to the youth minister and said, "I know a lot about Christianity, but I don't know a lot about this Jesus. I do know, however, that he sounds like he was interested in people like me." For several weeks, the two of them got together, read scripture, and talked about who Jesus was, why he came, and what he did for us.

Eventually, Braxton asked if he could invite some of his friends to come to church as well. Like him, they were the kind of folks Jesus was likely to hang out with. So they came, according to the youth minister, the scariest looking group of young people he had ever seen! They came to church and they learned about Jesus. They were welcomed and loved and accepted.

Because God had caught Braxton, he was also able to catch Braxton's friends.

The young man telling this story said, "I would like to tell you that Braxton finished school, went to seminary, and is now a minister . . . but he is not. Today he sits beside people who are getting tattoos and uses his time creating body art to share the love of God through Christ with the people who might not go to church but who are the very folks Jesus would likely seek out."

It is a beautiful day here by City Lake. The sky is clear, the sun makes the ripples on the lake sparkle. It is cold outside and won't warm up much today. For all but the most dedicated fishermen, it is not an ideal day for catching fish. It is, however, a perfect day for catching people. And that is exactly what God is doing.

When God catches you, when the reality of God's love and the wonder of God's ways in the world wrap themselves around you, you are, to paraphrase the hymnwriter, "caught in wonder, love, and praise." As I look around at you, you look like someone Jesus would want to get to know.

Have you been caught?

February 10, 2019

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We have neither the language nor the traditions of our ancestors to honor your holiness, O God. In our minds, holiness often means something separate from us and too pure for our secular and contemporary lives so the experience of Isaiah seems foreign and otherworldly to us. In some ways, Jesus has revealed a different kind of holiness to us, a sacredness which is more nearness and compassion and understanding of our mortal lives. If this be true, then we praise you for caring enough to come and live among us. We praise you for slipping into our skin and taking on our challenges. We praise you for not letting your holiness get in the way of loving us.

Perhaps, O God, it is your holiness that enables you to understand us so well and to love us unconditionally. It may well be a good thing to know that the ground on which we walk is made holy by your presence, that the space in which we dwell is sacred because you created it, and that every day we draw breath is divine because it is a gift from you. Thank you for wrapping us in your holiness.

We pray that you will help us to live in such a way that we are aware of these gifts. We ask that you teach us to live in such a way that we realize that the things we touch and the people we encounter are holy because they are also gifts from you. For that reason, we pray for your help in caring for our world and for each other. Guide us to find good ways to care for our planet. Teach us how to nurture and care for one another. Bring healing to all the world and hope to all your children.

Make us holy by your presence in our lives, O God, and put a song in our hearts as we walk with Christ day by day. In his name and by his grace we offer these and all of our prayers. Amen.