

Who Me?
Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11
February 8, 2004

Peter was tired and sleepy and worried. Up all night, and no fish to sell, no fish to eat. If he could have he'd have gone right home to get some sleep, but the nets had to be cleaned, so he and Andrew wearily began the task. And then Jesus appeared, followed by a huge crowd. He wasn't an easy man to refuse, so when he asked that the boat be taken out a way from the shore so he could speak with the crowd, Peter reluctantly agreed. Jesus had recently cured his mother-in-law, so he owed him a favor anyway. But after Jesus finished talking, when he told Peter to go out into the lake and cast his nets again, that was almost too much. After all, Peter knew fishing. He was the expert. He would never have told Jesus how to interpret scripture or heal people. Why should he take Jesus' advice on how to fish? So he said (with exasperation? with resignation?), "Master, we've been out all night and we haven't caught anything. But if you say so .. " and out he rowed and out went the nets and --wow, they'd never seen such a catch! What an abundance of fish! They signaled to James and John to come out and help them, because their nets were about to break. What a lesson to Peter! What a lesson to us. When Jesus tells people to do something, even when it seems futile, maybe even ridiculous to do it, the result can be abundance. At the wedding feast in Cana, when they needed wine and he told the servants to fill the jugs with water, they obeyed and there was an abundance of wine. When he held a small lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish in his hands and instructed the disciples to have everyone to sit down for a meal, over 5000 people were fed. There was food in abundance!

Yesterday at the mission rally one of the speakers was talking about abundance, and about how it comes in many forms, some of them

unexpected. And that started me to thinking about our friend, Reverend Caleb Wu, pastor of the Chinese congregation that worships here on Sunday afternoon. Did you know that Pastor Wu was once a Methodist Bishop in Taiwan? He had an honorable and secure position. And he gave it up to come to a country he didn't know to become pastor to a small struggling Presbyterian congregation in Southern California. He did this because Jesus said, "Go." He and his wife were talking with Jan and me about their church and their struggles. People have told them, "Look we have other, bigger churches you can serve." And, they have said, "No. This is our mission. This is the place God wants us." I hope they will be able to continue their ministry here. And even though it's been sometimes hard, I'm sure that if you asked them they would say, "God has blessed us abundantly." Let me tell you one more thing--a scary thing. They would probably also say, "One of our abundant blessings is the Community Presbyterian Church."

But we'd better get back to Peter. We left him there in his boat with his nets almost breaking and his boat almost sinking. What did Peter do then? Did he say "Jesus, you got me into this, get me out?" Did he thank Jesus for the huge catch? Did he invite him home for a fish fry? No, he fell to his knees and said, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Faced with the miracle Peter realized that Jesus was truly a prophet from God, he realized Jesus' goodness, his power. And in the face of that Peter suddenly felt his own unworthiness, his own sinfulness acutely. You remember how John the Baptist said he wasn't worthy to untie Jesus' sandals? You remember how Isaiah, having seen the glory of the Lord, surrounded by angels, said, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips"? That's what Peter was feeling. He was saying, "Jesus, if you really knew what I was like, you'd having nothing to do with me. Please, you'll find out

sooner or later what I'm like, go away now."

Jesus' power and goodness can do that to people. It should do that to people. The closer we get to Jesus and to the creator, the more we understand of their glory, the more aware we become of our own imperfections and sin. There is a reason that our worship service always begins with a hymn of praise to God, followed by a prayer of confession. But remember our confession is always followed by an assurance that we are pardoned, forgiven. And look what Jesus says to Peter. "Don't be afraid, Peter. Don't be afraid." And then, with a touch of humor, he tells him of his new job. "From now on you'll be catching people."

We say this was Peter's call, but it wasn't, was it? In Luke's account Jesus doesn't say "Follow me." No. It's as if he looks right into Peter's heart, and knows Peter wants to follow him. So the words he gives are words of assurance. "Don't be afraid Peter, for now on you'll be my disciple. From now on you'll be doing my work."

Can't you almost hear Peter saying. "Who, me? Me, a common fisherman, Me, the one who just told you I'm a sinner?" That's what we're tempted to say, too, isn't it? "Who, me? You must have made some mistake. You haven't taken into account, my sin, my imperfections, my temper, my lack of discipline, my..."

But God uses us anyway. We just read this morning what Paul said, "I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Listen to this evaluation of the disciples:

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph, Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop, Nazareth

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the 12 men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience i in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper.

Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants

The good news continues to be that God takes very unlikely sinful people and forgives them and uses them for the kingdom.

Like Peter, we don't need to be afraid. But we do have to do something. You remember how the story ends. They left everything and followed him. They left everything, their boats, their nets, the fish, their families, and followed him. That's what he expects of us. Maybe Jesus won't ask us, as he asked Caleb, to go to another country, but he still want all of us, he still wants us to follow where he leads. C. S. Lewis wrote, "He loves each one of us, he wants each one of us. and he wants every bit of us. There's no bargaining with him." Are you ready commit all of yourself to the Lord? Are you ready to follow Jesus?