

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

How could a fisherman be a great preacher? How could a crooked tax collector be a disciple of Christ? How could Simon the Zealot associate with a Roman collaborator (the tax collector) whom he was sworn to kill? Finally, how could this motley crew of twelve (you might call them the first “congregation”) move out from their homes and spread the Gospel of Christ to millions of people? The answer to all of these questions is, of course, that the Holy Spirit moved and enabled them.

These men did not see themselves as great orators or leaders or pastors or missionaries. Peter’s words to Jesus, asking Him to depart from the fisherman because of Peter’s sinfulness was much like Isaiah’s response when he found himself in the presence of God, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips...” Yet God sent Isaiah out as one of the great prophets of the Old Testament.

Jesus was about to send Peter on a lifelong journey that the fisherman never would have chosen for himself. Isaiah and Peter had something marvelous in common--their awe of God and the reality of His grace in their lives. Their response to God’s call was to obey, even though they found it hard to believe that He could possibly choose them to be His tools in the world.

The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and continues to be in the enabling and sending business. He sends us to worship and He sends us into the Word. He does that so that He can send us into the world. We are the fishermen, tax collectors, household managers, and engineers of today, called and enabled to tell our world the Good News.

Have you added Bible Study to your weekly schedule?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

1. In what role do we find Jesus in the opening verses of chapter 5 (vs. 1-3)? What might have been the subject matter of His teaching?
 2. What was unusual about Jesus’ request to begin fishing? What was the result of the fishing adventure?
 3. With what title does Simon address Jesus in vs. 5? Using the self-study Bible or another reference find about more about this title. Who uses it? Why is it significant?
 4. Why does Peter respond with a confession?
- For Family Reflection**
5. What does it mean to “be catching men”? Where does God want you to go “fishing”?
 6. In what ways were the fishermen obedient to Jesus (vs. 5)? In what ways is God asking you to obey His words? What promises does Jesus make to you?

First Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-13

Two of the temptations that Satan fired at Jesus strike uncomfortably at our own lifestyles.

Satan challenged Jesus to prove Himself the Son of God by creating bread from a stone. Jesus responded, "*Man shall not live on bread alone...*" The rest of that verse from Deuteronomy reads, "*...but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.*"

How often does Satan succeed in convincing us that we can do just fine on bread alone? You may say, "No, I do not believe that I can live without God." But do you try? Do you fail to find time for worship? Do you fail to find time for prayer? Do you fail to find time to read God's Word? None of us always manages to really seek out the God that we claim is essential in our lives.

Satan tried another tact with Jesus. He said, "*I will give you all this domain and its glory...*" Jesus said, "*You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.*" "Ahh," you retort. "Of that I am not guilty. I worship no idols made by the hand of man." Don't you? Is God really your only object of worship? What about the family, the job, success, wealth, self-image, new home, new car, or retirement account? Do any of these ever get in the way of doing the will of God? (And in case you're wondering--this writer isn't excluded from these accusations--I plead guilty to them all!)

So much for the bad news. Now to the good. Jesus understands why we fail to resist Satan's temptations. He is the only Man in history that denied Satan any tiny measure of success, even though Satan would not give up after this first encounter with Jesus. Verse 13 ends with, "*...he departed from Him until an opportune time.*" Satan never did succeed with Jesus, but he does just fine with us. That is why this story of Jesus' confrontation with Satan is so important to us.

Because Jesus succeeded where we fail; because His perfection allowed Him to pay for all of our sinfulness when He hung on the Cross, we are free to tell Satan "NO!" every time he tempts us. Jesus' gift of our salvation assures us that we have a place in His kingdom. Every day is a new day for those whose Lord is Christ.

Is your Bible wearing out from use, or is it in storage?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

First Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-13

1. When in Jesus ministry does the temptation take place? (Look back to chapter 3) What is significant about the timing of the devil's challenges?
2. Where did the temptation take place? How long did it last? What three specific temptations does Luke share with us?
3. How does Jesus respond to each of the temptations? What can we learn from Jesus' response?
4. Luke tells us that the devil "departed from him until an opportune time." When and where would the devil appear again in Jesus' ministry? Were the devil's temptations ever successful in stopping Jesus?

For Family Reflection

5. How does the devil tempt you? Can we always be successful in defeating him?
6. We have begun the Lenten season. What is the focus of the season? How can your family be strengthened in God's Word this season?

Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35

Rather than a sincere warning to Jesus, the Pharisees' words were more likely meant to get Him out of the area. His presence was causing all sorts of turmoil among the people, and the Pharisees were ready to be rid of Him and get things back to normal.

The world today would do the same. When Christians live out their lives in the will of Christ, the norm of behavior and expectations gets turned upside down. Women who are pregnant and afraid find out that there are people who love them enough to provide needed medical care and counseling, as well as financial help. They learn that abortion is not their only option. Alcoholics discover that there are friends who will help them in bad times. Homeless people discover that Christians are there to help them get back into the mainstream of society. Most of all, through visitations, home Bible studies, support groups, midweek youth groups, etc., the hopeless discover that Jesus Christ has paid for their sin and grants them eternal and abundant life as His children.

The world invited Jesus to leave because He caused too much turmoil--the turmoil of love. The world invites Christians to leave for the same reason. Christians demonstrating that God is the Master and the answer to the world's sickness is more than Satan can bear. They draw too many people away from his power and into God's kingdom.

Jesus boldly answered the challenge to leave. He proclaimed God's love in the face of rejection. He won the battle. His love was fully and finally demonstrated on the cross.

Now, we face the invitation to stay out of the world's business. The invitation gets more and more serious every year. Christians are condemned and ridiculed. Christianity is criticized for being less loving than most of the religions of the world. How will we respond?

Will we back out of the fray and insulate ourselves in our churches? Many German Lutherans in the 1940s pulled back into the safety of the church and ended up seeing the crosses removed from their churches and replaced with the swastika. What will we do? Will we be silent or will we do in our world what Christ would do?

Invite a friend to Bible study!

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35

1. Who was the "fox" (vs. 32)? Was Jesus frightened by the threats?
2. What is significant about Jesus' prophecy "the third day I finish my course?" (vs. 32) Even though we are in a long Lenten season, what events await us?
3. Why was Jesus grieving over Jerusalem? What had happened in Jerusalem in its past? Using a study Bible or other reference find out what happened to Jerusalem in subsequent years.

For Family Reflection

4. What is comforting about the picture of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings (vs. 34)?
5. Read Psalm 118:26. Where do we find this verse in the Gospel reading? What blessings come in the name of the Lord?
6. What circumstances in our family, our church, or our community might make Jesus sad today? Where do we find hope and joy in our situation?

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Luke 9:28-36

Verse 34 says of the disciples, "...and they were afraid as they entered the cloud." Surely the Transfiguration became one of their most treasured memories, but in the midst of the experience they were afraid. They realized that this was no vision, as they were "fully awake." It was a reality over which they had no control--they were simply there to witness the event. With our modern understanding of Jesus and the gospels, I'm sure that we would not be afraid--or would we?

One of the very basic implications of the word "holy" is "different." God is so different from us that we cannot begin to understand how He works. Jesus showed God to man and sinful man could not stand His presence. John says, "...those who were His own did not receive Him." Jesus, Himself, said that His teaching could not be contained in "old wineskins." Human beings, to understand God even a little, have to submit to becoming a new creature; experiencing a new birth; leaving behind an old life.

In the Transfiguration, the three disciples witnessed something just about as "different" as we could ever imagine. They saw Jesus glorified, speaking with Moses and Elijah. To be in such a situation, but have no control over what might happen to us, as observers, would challenge the most courageous believer.

Unless we are blessed to see Jesus return in the clouds, we will not experience anything close to the disciples' presence at the Transfiguration, but Jesus is with us every day asking us to give everything into His hand and control; to stop fearing. He invites us to enter the cloud of His presence and protection, but we are often afraid of the invitation. Perhaps we are afraid because, like the disciples, we realize that this invitation is real. It is not just a vision offering us reassurance.

Jesus is HOLY. He is beyond our total understanding, yet He is our Lord, not just in our dreams, but in reality. Turning ourselves, our families, our jobs, our lives over to him is a fearful thing, but like the disciples, we will be blessed beyond our wildest dreams.

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Luke 9:28-36

1. Which disciples went with Jesus to the mountain? In what other settings do we find this threesome?
2. Which two Old Testament heroes were present at the Transfiguration? Why was their appearance appropriate and significant?
3. How was the glory of Jesus demonstrated at this event? What do we learn about Jesus from His transfiguration?
4. What message came from heaven at the Transfiguration (vs. 35)? At what other event did we hear a similar message? What is the significance of the Father's words?

For Family Reflection

5. Have you ever been at church, Sunday school, or some other event and felt like Peter, "It is good that we are here?" Tell about it.
6. The Transfiguration ends the Epiphany season. How have you seen the glory of Jesus this season? Did you have the opportunity to tell someone about Jesus?