

Who Does Jesus Call? And For What Purpose?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4, verse 43 through chapter 5, verse 13, chapter 5, verses 18 through 20, and verses 27 through 32 as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke. But he said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God in other towns also, because that is why I was sent.

And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.

He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore.

[1 : 23] Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, I've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything, but because you say so, I will let down the nets. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

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. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man.

For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 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. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.

[2 : 37] When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

I am willing, he said. Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

So when Jesus saw their faith, he said, Friend, your sins are forgiven. After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth.

Follow me, Jesus said to him. And Levi got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

[3 : 44] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus answered them, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning, Christ Church. Is it warm enough in here? We turn the heat up a little bit. You good? All right.

We are, we've been looking at the gospel of Luke, and we're here in the early days of the ministry of Jesus, and we're looking at some of the ways that Jesus calls his first disciples to come and follow him and to begin to participate in his mission.

And Peter is, you know, the main person we're going to be talking about this morning. And Peter is a guy who, he met Jesus the way that most people do, which is that someone invited him.

[4 : 53] You know, someone brought him to Jesus. Peter would have never encountered Jesus had he not been brought by another person. We would have never heard of Peter unless his brother Andrew had met Jesus and begun to follow Jesus.

And the very first thing that his brother Andrew does is he says, I'm going to go get Peter. And he gets Peter and he says, hey, we found, we found the Messiah. We found the Christ.

You've got to come meet Jesus. And so that's kind of where our story picks up. Peter has, he's a guy who's, he's met Jesus, but he's never really experienced the power of Jesus.

Peter, he's met Jesus, but he's not yet a follower who surrendered himself to Jesus. He's not yet a disciple or an apprentice who submitted himself to Jesus.

And so we notice in the story that Jesus intentionally seeks Peter out. He deliberately steps into not just any old boat, but into Peter's boat.

[6 : 01] And why did he get into Peter's boat? Well, on one level, you know, the crowds are pressing in and Jesus figures he can more effectively preach the word of God and about the kingdom of God to all these people better from the boat.

But on another level, why does he choose to get into Peter's boat? And I believe that this moment, like pretty much every moment in the ministry and the life of Jesus, it's not random.

Right? It happens carefully and prayerfully because it's something Jesus planned to do. And the reason Jesus steps into Peter's boat is that Jesus is fishing for people.

Right? Jesus wants to catch people and he's fishing for this particular fisherman named Peter. He sees this man who's not yet a disciple and he wants to catch him.

He wants to gather him into his net. And how does Jesus do that? Well, it says in verse 2 that he saw the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets and he got into one of the boats the one belonging to Simon Peter and he asked him to put out a little bit from shore.

[7 : 15] So Jesus just initiates this simple relationship, this simple conversation. Much like he did with that woman at the well in Samaria. He just said, hey, I'm thirsty.

Can you give me a drink? You can imagine this conversation where Jesus has asked Peter for help and says, hey, Peter, I know you're doing your job. I know you're washing your nets. I know that we barely even know each other but would you mind helping me out?

Would it be okay if I use your stuff? Would you mind if I borrow your boat? You mind pushing out a little bit from shore? And Jesus just simply begins to share his life with Peter and asks Peter to share his life with him.

And Jesus puts himself interestingly in this non-religious space with this not-yet-disciple Peter and he steps into Peter's world and he gets on Peter's calendar and he gets involved in Peter's life and he asks Peter for help and he shares Peter's stuff and what happens as a result when Jesus just shares his life is amazing.

And that's what we're going to look at in the next few minutes this incredible scene of Jesus and Peter's boat. And I want to look at it together under three headings. I want to think together about the challenge of Jesus and the transforming grace of Jesus and then the mission of Jesus.

[8 : 37] Okay? So the challenge of Jesus the transforming grace of Jesus and the mission of Jesus. So first of all let's think together about the challenge of Jesus that Peter gets.

Peter finds himself involved in Jesus' work by letting him use his boat and now Jesus begins to involve himself in Peter's work by showing Peter how to fish.

And it says in verse 4 when Jesus had finished speaking he said to Simon Peter put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Now you need to know that that is terrible fishing advice.

Peter is tired. He's frustrated. He's been fishing all night long. He's caught nothing and he must have had some sort of visceral reaction to Jesus' words but you can kind of tell he's trying to hold it together and be respectful and diplomatic so Peter says to Jesus in verse 5 Master we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.

You see Jesus is not a fisherman. Jesus is a tectone. He's a builder. He's a stonemason and he's just a preacher. What does he know? But Peter spent his whole life fishing these waters.

[9 : 57] Peter like his father before him and his grandfather before him he knows how to fish and he's made a really good living at fishing and Peter knows that Jesus is giving him bad advice.

Jesus is asking him to do something that's against his own instincts and his own experience and Jesus knows this too. Jesus knows what a high challenge this is going to be for Peter.

Jesus actually knows right? He knows that the optimal time to go fishing is at night when the waters have cooled down and the fish have come up to the surface in the shallows and they can't see in the dark and you trap them in your nets that's how you're supposed to fish.

And Jesus also knows that the most absurd time to go would be right now when the sun has come up and the waters heated up and the fish have gone deeper Jesus knows that this seems like terrible advice and that in the eyes of others Peter is going to look absolutely ridiculous and absurd. And by the way this is how pretty much most of the Christian life works. Jesus says hey I want you to trust me to go against conventional wisdom.

[11 : 15] Jesus says hey I want you to do things that viewed from the outside are going to look stupid. Stuff like being sacrificial with your power. Being self-giving with your time.

Things like being generous with your money and disciplined with your sexuality. Things like having integrity at work and being faithful even when it hurts. Jesus tells us try it my way.

Try it my way. And that's exactly what he's saying to Peter. Try it my way. Now how does Peter respond to Jesus challenge to trust him? Well it's incredible.

He says in verse 5 Master we worked hard all night we haven't caught anything but because you say so I will let down the nets. Other translations say but at your word.

And Peter he's not thinking hey this is going to work out for me. He's not thinking you know this yeah this seems like a really good use of my time. He's not thinking you know what I'm going to get out of this is a really good story and it's really going to help my reputation.

[12 : 21] No he just says because you say so. Because you are trustworthy I'm going to trust you. the first step of following Jesus as a disciple begins for Peter by just hearing the word of God and then stepping out in faith on that word as if it's wiser than Peter's wisdom.

And it's a critical moment for Peter right? It's a fateful decision. The reason we know Peter at all is because he responds because you say so at your word and he just acts on the word that he gets from the Lord.

And it says in verse 6 when they had done so they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 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.

And what that tells us is that it's good to trust Jesus. It's good to obey Jesus. This is the biggest catch of their lives. It's a massive haul of fish.

It's the most success they've ever had in their careers. Their nets are breaking. Their boats are sinking. And they're thinking to themselves, they must be thinking to themselves, where did Jesus get this power and this authority?

[13 : 48] How does Jesus know better than Peter how Peter's life is supposed to go? And how is Jesus able to give us a more abundant and more fruitful life if we would just trust him and surrender to him and submit to him?

And look at how Peter responds in verse eight. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.

this moment that we see, you know, throughout the scriptures, the prophet Isaiah, when he encounters the presence and the power of God, when he comes and he sees the glory of God, that God is holy, holy, holy as the Lord God Almighty who was, who is, and who is to come.

What does the prophet Isaiah say? He says, woe to me, I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.

He says, go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man. When the Lord speaks to Job out of the storm, what does Job say?

[15 : 00] How does Job respond? He says, I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes. Peter has just experienced the wisdom and the power and the authority of the eternal son of God and he says, go away from me Lord.

I'm not worthy to be near you. I'm not worthy to even be anywhere close to the vicinity of your holiness because I am sinful.

I'm a sinner full of sin. And this is how you know that you've begun a real relationship with the real Jesus. It's that you see power and holiness in him and therefore you see weakness and sinfulness in yourself.

You realize when you get into the presence of Jesus' beauty how spiritually and morally ugly you are and how curved in on yourself you've actually become.

You realize in the presence of Jesus' truth how fraudulent and false and phony and self-centered and self-serving you actually are. You realize in the presence of Jesus' goodness how even your best attempts to love are just deeply flawed and compromised with self-interest.

[16:15] You realize in the presence of Jesus' sovereignty and his supremacy how small and how puny you are. And you realize in the presence of his holiness and his righteousness just how full of sin you really are.

That there's this vast difference between you and Jesus. And that radically begins to deconstruct yourself. It begins to deconstruct your identity, your foundation, your core of who you thought you were.

Seeing Jesus for who he really is causes you to see yourself for who you really are and it fills you with this sense that I'm more flawed, I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe.

And you have this fresh awareness of your own poverty, your own unworthiness, your own humility before the Lord. And you say, you know what, I have, actually, I have nothing to offer God.

I am poor in spirit, I am utterly bankrupt before God. You see, many people are like Peter, they have some familiarity with Jesus, they've come into contact with Jesus, maybe they've even listened a little bit to Jesus, and perhaps even they've let Jesus use their stuff, but they're not yet a humbled and surrendered follower.

[17:41] Many people, they've only experienced the invitation of Jesus, but they've not yet stepped into this challenge of Jesus, they've not yet taken a step to trust in Jesus, they've not yet taken that risk of looking foolish and ridiculous and absurd in response to Jesus.

They've not yet surrendered and submitted themselves to Jesus and therefore have not really experienced the wisdom and the power and the authority of Jesus or the sinfulness and self-centeredness of their own hearts.

And maybe that's you today. Maybe you're at that critical moment, maybe you're at that fateful decision where Peter was, where Jesus is just waiting for you to say to him, because you say so, at your word.

And I wonder what might be keeping you from just quietly, even just silently in your heart today, just saying to Jesus, you know, because you say so, I'm going to try to trust in you.

That's the challenge of Jesus. But I also want to think together about the transforming grace of Jesus. Let's talk about the transforming grace of Jesus.

[18:56] Look at verse 10. It says, then Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid, from now on you will fish for people. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him.

And what I want to do for a moment is just I want to explore those five words, from now on you will. Okay? Five words, from now on you will. If you want to underline those, you can.

And you've got to pay close attention and just follow me because it's going to take me a minute to unpack these five words. But God's grace in Jesus Christ is this unconditioned and incongruous gift.

We talked about this last week. It does not match the worth of its recipients and it's unlimited by our sinfulness, right? Peter confesses, I am sinful. I am full of sin.

He acknowledges, I have no claim to status or favor with God. He recognizes the incongruity, right, between how poor and how unworthy he is and how good and gracious and how powerful and holy the Lord is.

[20:08] And nevertheless, God's grace is given freely to Peter. It's given without prior conditions to Peter. It's given without regard to Peter's worth or his capacity.

And this is incredibly good news if you're a sinful person like Peter or like me. It's just really good news that God and his grace works like this. But it's so very easy to misunderstand the grace of God because many people will say, ah, because the grace of God is free, it must be cheap.

Right? Because the grace of God is free, it must be cheap. And it must not cost God very much to offer it if it's free and it must not cost me very much to receive it if it's free.

And because this is such a widely held misunderstanding and creating so much dysfunction in the lives of individual Christians and in collective Christian communities, I just want to go a little deeper here.

Because the grace of God is free, it must be cheap. But you know, when we look at God's side, when we look at the incarnation and the crucifixion, when we look at God's side, God's grace is anything but cheap.

[21 : 27] Right? It costs God very much to give His grace to Peter and to us. Right? God the Father gave His only and beloved Son.

Jesus had to empty Himself of all of His heavenly glory and riches to come to earth. He had to empty Himself of all of His status and His privileges of eternity to step into time and take on human flesh.

But we really see the cost of God's grace most clearly in the crucifixion where Christ crucified is at the center of this gospel of grace because it shows us how much it costs God to deal with our sin. The Apostle Paul summarizes it this way in one of the greatest verses of the Bible. He says in 2 Corinthians 5.21, God made Him who knew no sin or had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

That's the cost of grace is that the one who had no sin had to become sin for us. The crucifixion is the price tag for how much it costs, how much free grace actually costs God.

[22 : 43] But what about on our side? Does grace cost us anything? Does it cost us anything to receive God's free grace?

And I want to show that Peter demonstrates to us that yes, God's grace coming into our lives costs us actually everything. If you look at verse 10 again it says, Jesus says to Peter, don't be afraid, from now on you will fish for people.

So they pulled their boats on shore, left everything, and followed Him. You guys still with me a little bit? Am I? Okay. I know I'm going up a little bit.

But what happens when sinful Peter experiences the grace of God in Jesus Christ? Jesus says to him, Peter, from now on you will.

The grace of God is a watershed before and after event in our lives where we hear these words, from now on you will.

[23 : 47] Right? From now on you, Peter, are no longer your own. From now on you no longer belong to yourself anymore.

anymore. From now on you are not your own master, you have a new master. From now on you're no longer in control of your life.

From now on you do not get to decide what doctrines are true and what you're going to believe.

From now on you don't get to pick and choose what ethics are right and how you're going to live.

From now on you're no longer the Lord of your life because why? Jesus is Lord. That's the message of the whole New Testament is that Jesus is the Lord and we're not.

Yes, God freely welcomes us and he includes us as we are but his free grace does not allow us to remain as we are. And if Peter were here today he would tell you Jesus did not allow me to stay as I was.

[24 : 52] That would be cheap grace and that you receive God's grace and after that anything goes and you can just live as you please. But the grace of God, what I'm trying to say is that the grace of God is free but it's not cheap.

The grace of God is both free and as we can see with Peter it's demanding. The grace of God is both liberating and as we can see with Peter it's transforming.

Cheap grace is grace without expectations. Cheap grace is grace without obligations of response.

But how does Peter respond? He pulled his boat up on shore, left everything and followed him.

God's grace in Jesus Christ is so transforming that Peter leaves his old life behind to begin a new life as a surrendered apprentice, a submitted disciple of Jesus.

God's grace in Jesus Christ is so transforming that Peter leaves behind the biggest catch of his life, all the enormous profits that would accrue to him as a result of taking it to market.

[26 : 00] He leaves behind piles of cash, all the wealth that would have given him to feed his family for an entire year. God's grace in Jesus Christ is so transforming that Peter leaves all of that behind

to go and follow Jesus in this new identity in this new mission that Jesus has for him.

It's not cheap grace. It's costly grace. It literally costs Peter a lot of money. The grace of God is given freely in that it's given without prior conditions.

It's given without regard to worth, the capacity. It's given to people who say, I am a sinful man. But that does not mean that God's grace comes without expectations of return, with no hope for a response, with no strings attached.

God's grace carries strong expectations because it's a costly grace. It's a transforming grace. When the Apostle Paul writes his greatest letter, the letter to the Romans, he spends 11 chapters unpacking what grace means.

And then when you get to chapter 12, he says, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, in view of his grace, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, just as Peter's doing here.

[27 : 19] This is your true and proper worship. He says, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Jesus says, from now on, you will.

And it's a word of costly grace. God's grace in Jesus Christ causes such a fundamental reconfiguration and remolding of the self that it recreates in us a whole new set of values, new dispositions, new habits, new practices, new purposes, as the inevitable and the necessary expression of God's grace in our lives.

Does any of that make sense? So, if you're going to become a disciple of Jesus, you've got to not only respond to the invitation of Jesus, but also there's the challenge of Jesus.

And then if you respond to the challenge of Jesus, there's this transforming grace of Jesus, right? You can't stay as you were. But then finally, I want you to just see for a minute the mission of Jesus. The mission of Jesus. Here is Peter and he's eyeball to eyeball with this person who he now realizes is a person of incredible wisdom and power and authority. That Jesus has absolute control over nature.

[28 : 42] That he's sovereign over every square inch of space, every molecule of matter, every nanosecond of time. And what does the sovereign Lord say to sinful Peter? He says in verse 10, from now on you will what?

Fish for people. From now on you're going to fish for people. Peter, I have a future for you. I want you to be my partner.

I want you to join in what I'm doing. I want you to participate in my mission. Peter, just as you've been fishing for fish, and just as I've been fishing for you, Peter, from now on you're going to join me in fishing for people and catching people.

And that's what God's free but costly grace does to us. It sends us out into the world to serve others. It sends us to no longer live for ourselves but to live for a greater and bigger cause, the greatest mission that's ever been conceived in this world, the mission of Jesus.

And Luke chapter 5 gives us these four amazing examples of Jesus catching people. First of all, he catches Peter. And then he goes and catches a leper and a paralytic and a tax collector.

[29 : 51] Each of these deserves a sermon. I'm going to give them each about a minute. You ready? First of all, the leper. This man has debilitating skin disease.

He's a social outcast. He's not allowed to live in town. He's not allowed to have a job. He's not allowed to go to worship. And because of these things, this man is economically poor.

He's relationally and emotionally isolated. He's spiritually cursed. And Jesus is bringing Peter along and he's showing Peter, okay, let me show you how to catch people like this.

This is how you fish for a man like this. And it says that Jesus reaches out his hand and he touches the leper. Like, when's the last time this guy's been touched?

You don't touch lepers. And Jesus could have easily healed this man without touching him at all. But Jesus knows that he needs to be brought back into community.

[30 : 54] He needs to be shown a compassion that nobody's ever shown him. He needs not just to be cleansed. He needs to be loved and accepted in the way that his heart is longing for. And he shows Peter, if you want to reach people, you've got to reach out and touch them.

And then secondly, we get not only this leper, but we get this paralytic who has these amazing friends and they go to great lengths. They go way out of their way to just get people to Jesus. And we know in the other Gospels that the house that they bring this man to and they tear the roof off of, it's actually Peter's house.

And I'm sure Peter's, like, not super jazzed about his roof. I mean, I just, that's a total bummer. And he gets, they get the man down to Jesus.

And what does Jesus say to this paralyzed man? He says, friend, your sins are forgiven. And everybody's looking around at Jesus going like, hey, that's not what they came for. He's paralyzed. And Jesus says, friends, your sins are forgiven. He's saying, look, you've come to me with a certain problem that you think needs to be solved. But what I want to tell you is that you have a much deeper problem.

[32 : 01] You've got two paralyzing diseases, not just one. And Jesus is showing Peter that when you go fish for people, when you go to catch people, don't just look for the paralysis of their body or their life.

Look for the paralysis of their soul. Jesus says to this man, there are sins between you and God. You're not right with God. And what you most need, your fundamental problem, the disease that's most destroying you is that you need your sins to be forgiven.

And Peter, when you go fish for people, when you go catch for people, that is people's most fundamental need. They need to experience the forgiveness of God. And Jesus takes Peter fishing not only for this leper and for this paralytic to put that man back in a right relationship with God, but he also goes fishing for this tax collector, this guy who's the worst.

Levi, he's been collaborating with the Roman occupying power. He's been oppressing and extorting his fellow Jews. He's been making egregious spiritual, moral, and relational compromises.

Tax collectors were just the most deeply resented and wildly unpopular people. They were traitors. They were thieves. They were the most hated group of social outcasts.

[33 : 21] And Jesus says to Peter, let's go fishing. Let's go catch. Let's go catch somebody else. Jesus is showing Peter that fishing for people and catching people means deliberately going after those people who are out on the margins, intentionally pursuing people who've been written off as too far from God, going after people that have been dismissed as they're never going to become part of the family of God or the kingdom of God.

And Jesus says, Peter, it's all about touching people that you're not supposed to touch. It's all about helping people experience forgiveness who have deep spiritual problems.

It's all about eating and drinking like your family with people that don't belong at a table. That's what fishing for people is all about. That's what it means to be part of my mission.

He says, I have not come to call people who think that they are healthy and who think that they are righteous and who think that they do not need a doctor and they do not need a healer. He says, no, I've come to call people who know themselves to be sick sinners in need of repentance.

And friends, if the free but costly grace of God has come into your life, I think the question for us today is, are we willing to just begin to follow Jesus and join Him in His fishing ministry as He wants to fish for people?

[34 : 51] Just as Peter caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break and their boats began to sink. Over these past 2,000 years, Jesus has caught so many people in His nets and so many people in His boat.

And I believe He doesn't just want to do that like back then, a long time ago, but He wants to do it now. He doesn't want to do it in other parts of the world. He wants to do it here.

And I think that Jesus is saying to us in 2025, hey, Christ Church, let me show you how to fish for people. If you'll just put out in some deep water and let down your nets for a catch and do something that maybe is uncomfortable for you, I can do it.

And so the question is whether or not we're going to trust Jesus. The question is whether or not we're going to respond like Peter and just say, you know what, Jesus? That sounds good. Because you say so.

I'm going to try it your way. May God give us that amazing faith that Peter had that changed his life forever, changed the world forever.

[36 : 03] In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen. Amen. Amen.