

“Don’t Be Afraid”

(Light for the World #6)

Luke 5: 1-11 (New International Version)

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

¹ 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.

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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.



Reflection on the Word:

1. Why were the people crowding around Jesus by the Lake? See chapter 4 for some hints.
2. What do you think Simon Peter was thinking when Jesus got into his boat and started teaching?
3. What do you think was the tone of Simon Peter’s response to Jesus in verse 5?
4. Why do you think Simon Peter reacted the way he did in verse 8?
5. What is the significance of Jesus’ response in verse 10? Do you think his response answers Simon Peter’s concern that he was a sinful man?

Family Time or Small Group (Better Together) Discussion:

- 1) What are your biggest fears?
- 2) When you think of your biggest fears, where do you think they came from?
- 3) How do our fears keep us from following God's call in our lives? Do you have an example of this from your own life?
- 4) What do you need to leave behind in order to fully follow Jesus?
- 5) How can I pray for you?

Series Resources:

- What Are We Fighting For?; Thomas Bickerton, Abingdon Press, 2016.
- Coming Together Around What Matters Most; Thomas Bickerton, Abingdon Press, 2016.
- United Methodist Divided; Dale McConkey, Global Parish Press, 2018.

Sermon Resources:



Series Progression

(from "We Better Stop, Hey, What's That Sound?" based on Luke 4: 14-21 by Rev. Tim Craig):

In case you don't know, today is Super Bowl Sunday. And I love preaching on Super Bowl Sunday! There's always a certain excitement in the air on Super Bowl Sunday ... even if your favorite team isn't in the big game. In fact, I really prefer that my favorite team isn't in the Super Bowl because ... well, then I might watch it. The game that is.

I hope this isn't you; but unfortunately, it is me.

I get nervous when my favorite team is playing. I want them to win so bad that I do things that I shouldn't do like eat a whole bag of Doritos at the Super Bowl party. Just terrible, I know. Dorito Nacho Cheese breath for a whole month. Awful.

And as bad as that is, if I get anywhere near the remote controller, I switch channels when things get a little tight in the game. I try to cover it all up by letting everyone know that the real action is with the Kitten Bowl on the Hallmark Channel. *Check this out. This kitten just goes nuts over cat nip. And just wait, we can't change the channel until after they bring out the laser pointers.*

And “no” the home crowd does not go wild when I am freaking out.

This year, no problem. I’m perfectly fine. I don’t have a stake in the outcome. May the best team win. May the commercials be entertaining and may there be no malfunctions of any kind during the half time show or whatever they call it these days. Let the game begin!

And so, while it is Super Bowl Sunday, I get to just go with the flow. How about you? Do we have any go with the flow folk this morning? Folks who just don’t care who wins or who loses the big game?

To be fair, do we have any New England Patriots fans here this morning? Good, good ... you folks know that you been hogging up the Super Bowl for awhile now right. You all have quite a few trophies and championships and that the Bible teaches that you need to share right? Just checking ...

Share with the underdogs ... like the Los Angeles Rams. Any Rams fans out there this morning? Good luck to you. Remember David took down Goliath and whew ... you are going to need a well- placed stone to the forehead this afternoon. But keep the faith my friends. Faith moves mountains!

And so here we are ... on this Super Bowl Sunday. We have some Rams fans, and some Patriots fans, and a whole lot of who cares fans. And we are all here under one roof; surrounded by four walls waiting for the sermon to actually begin.

Waiting to hear something of value.

After all, Joseph and Mary’s kid ... Jesus is here today with us. Some folk are saying some good things about Jesus. There has been talk about his teaching from neighboring towns. When he was baptized, the heavens opened and some say that they heard God’s voice say, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Then there was this other story of a miracle in which Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana. Who here doesn’t like a good wedding party?

I guess we could say that some folk are “Team Jesus”. And some were back then.

It stands to reason that there had to have been some folk, who may not have been fans of Jesus. He was the hometown kid who spent some time in Egypt. At least that was the rumor. His parents received special treatment from God and although he was born in Bethlehem, they got him out before King Herod, in his paranoia of maintaining kingship, killed all of those innocent boys. Do you remember that? ... I bet they did. There is truth to the words that Jesus said about his hometown Nazareth.

All the gospels agree that Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, wasn’t all in with “Team Jesus”. In fact, Jesus said this about his hometown. “A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, on the streets he played in as a child.” (Mark 6: 4, The Message)

I guess we could say that some folk were not rooting for “Team Jesus” on that long-ago Sabbath day. Yet they were all under the same roof, surrounded by four walls waiting for the reading from the scroll from Isaiah the Prophet to actually begin.

I almost forgot ... I wonder ... to be fair yet once again ... I wonder how many were there that Sabbath afternoon that didn’t care one way or the other of who was reading. They were there just going with the flow of the times and the flow of the service. Something else was on their mind.

A worry. We all have worries don’t we?

A doubt. We all have doubts don’t we?

A struggle. Any struggles out there?

A sin. Whether by thought or action or by non- action ... any sinners here this morning?

I wish it weren’t so, but it is true. So true. Our worries, doubts, struggles and sins all add up to a final score totaling and revealing our fears. A Super Bowl of fears in which there are no winners; for *“paranoia strikes deep. Into your life it will creep. It starts when you’re always afraid. You step out of line, the man come and take you away.”* And so, we are left with only losers surrounded by four walls waiting for and wanting to hear the Good News from God to actually begin.

Readings from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah were common. And Jesus read, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. There is something happening here ... We’ve better stop; hey ... what’s that sound? Everybody look; what’s going down.

He **began** by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The key word is “began”. He didn’t just say to them “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” He **began** by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

In other words, Jesus says to everyone in the house. *Stop the side taking. Stop living in the fear of bad news, no hope, and no power of grace. Begin here. Right here. The Spirit of the Lord is on me and the year of the Lord’s favor has been unleashed. It begins now in your hearing because of me.*

It begins now in our hearing as well! It’s the sound of us, though we are at least from three camps, Rams, Patriots and don’t care one way or the other ... it is the sound of us living in peace, walking with each other in perfect harmony ... because we look to Jesus; we rely on Jesus; O God ... we need Jesus ... the One on whom the Spirit of the Lord has descended. Jesus, our Savior, our world champion and MVP! The One and only One, who from the beginning, brings us both unity and peace. We’ve better stop; hey ... what’s that sound? Everybody look; what’s going down. Amen.

Sermon Points:

Have you ever been afraid? I mean truly afraid. I want you to think about that thing that scares you the most. I am sure it didn’t take most of you too long to come up with something. We all have fears. In fact, the National Institutes of Mental Health suggests that phobias affect approximately 19.2 million adults in the United States. And there are some that we hold in common. While the research is somewhat conflicting, my search showed a list of about ten phobias that are some of the most common. By a show of hands, let’s see how many of us share these phobias. And we may learn some new words in the process.

1. Ophidiophobia: Fear of snakes
2. Trypanophobia: Fear of needles
3. Cynophobia: Fear of dogs
4. Acrophobia: Fear of heights
5. Aerophobia: Fear of flying
6. Astraphobia: Fear of thunder and lightning
7. Mysophobia: Fear of germs
8. Claustrophobia: Fear of tight places

The research I did revealed that one of the next two phobias are the most common in the United States.

9. Glossophobia: fear of public speaking

While, I do get nervous every time I stand up in front of you all to preach, I would not say that I suffer from a fear of public speaking. However, I definitely suffer from this final and very common phobia.

10. Arachnophobia: Fear of spiders

These common phobias are also marked with common physical reactions to fear – symptoms such as dizziness, sweating, nausea, breathlessness, and in some cases full-blown panic attacks. As I was preparing for this message, I wanted to share with you all a funny meme that I saw on Facebook. A meme, in case you don’t know, is a funny image, video or text that is copied and then shared and spreads quickly over the internet. This particular meme said, “Me when I see a spider” and then showed a looping video clip of a person running and diving out of a window. It cracked me up when I saw it, because that pretty much is me when I see a spider, so I wanted to find it so that I could give you all a funny visual. Well, I am sorry, but I couldn’t do it. This was the best I could do. (Picture of person holding a dog with caption “Are you sure the spider is gone?”) I couldn’t find the other meme, because I was too afraid. As I sat down at my computer in my office and typed “spider meme” into a google search, I quickly became physically ill as I was scrolling through the images and videos. I started to feel panicked and sick to my stomach scrolling through the, seemingly unlimited, images of spiders on the internet. Giant spiders. Spiders jumping. Spiders crawling on people's faces and even out of their mouths. It was horrifying. Then, I had several sleepless nights last week, as I had entirely too realistic nightmares of huge spiders stalking me in my house. This may sound ridiculous, but I didn’t feel so bad when I read that as many as 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men are afraid of spiders. The question is why? Why are so many people afraid of these creepy eight-legged creatures? Especially considering that while there are an estimated 35,000 different species of spiders, only around a dozen of these pose

any type of real threat to humans. One possible explanation is that such creatures once posed a considerable threat to our ancestors who lacked the medical knowledge to address injuries and so evolution contributed to a predisposition to fear. It's hard to know for sure, but I am pretty sure I know where my fear of spiders came from – my Mom. Some fears are definitely learned. And in my case, I learned at a young age to be afraid of spiders. You see, my mom is terrified of spiders. As a child, she lived in an area of California where there were some really big ones. And she told me stories about how her older brother would catch these giant spiders in big mason jars and then would threaten to open them up on top of her head. I don't think he ever actually did, but the fear sunk in nonetheless. As a child, my mom would lose her mind at the sight of a spider. I will never forget the time we were driving home from school and she saw a spider in the car. She screamed, pulled the car over to the side of the road, got out of the car and wouldn't get back in until my brother showed her proof of the deceased creature. Needless to say, as a young child, this taught me to fear spiders. Recently, I saw a spider at the bottom of our stairs. My son, Braden, was sleeping, so I called for Maddie to get the spider. Well, she panicked worse than me. We had to wake up Braden out of a sound sleep to handle the little beast. I realized in that moment that I had passed my arachnophobia on to my daughter as well!

So, why am I telling you all of this? Well, it isn't simply to share a fun fact about Pastor Jessica or to provide you with a great idea for a good prank. Which, let me be clear, would not be funny. At. All. So, don't get any ideas, Randall. I tell you all of this, so that I can share this good news. God will deliver you from your fears. This is a true and miraculous truth. God is bigger than our fears, and God can and will deliver us from our fears. I have experienced this truth in my own life. I shared one example of this with the children about a time when I was camping. *(We have a lot of scouts here, and they go camping a lot, so maybe some of you can relate. When I was a kid, I enjoyed camping, but I was the kind of camper who would check and recheck and then check again to make sure there were no spiders in my tent. And then I would zip it up tight to make sure none got in. Well, on one particular camping trip, we camped out in the open. Open air camping is what they called it and all the kids were so excited.... Well, all the kids except for me. I was terrified. So scared that I couldn't fall asleep. When all the other kids had fallen asleep, I was still awake, afraid of what creepy crawlers were around me in the dark. I started to cry silently which did not help my situation. As I cried, my nose started running and then got stopped up completely, so much so, that as I would start to fall asleep, my mouth would drift open so I could breathe better, which would wake me up immediately as I had nightmares of a spider crawling into my mouth. And do you know what I did? I prayed. I prayed so hard that God would give me a peace. And you can guess what happened next. My fear subsided. When I turned to and trusted God, I was able to let go of that fear.)* I have had other experiences like this. The year after I graduated from high school, I went with my Mom on a mission trip to an Indian Reservation in Oklahoma. We slept on the floor of a building where there were tarantulas. Actual tarantulas. (Show picture from the trip) The boys in our group would catch them. It was horrifying. I was going to be there for a week. What was I going to do? My mom and I prayed and God delivered us from our fear. Not forever. I'm clearly not free of my phobia, but on that trip, God gave us a tangible peace that freed us from the chains of that fear that would have kept us from doing the work to which we had been called. A couple years later I had a similar situation on a mission trip to Zimbabwe. We were working with children in an AID's orphanage. It was important, life changing work. And when we got to the hotel where we would be sleeping, much to my horror and dismay, there were spiders in the room. Not like one or two that scamper away, but spiders on the walls and ceilings. (Show picture from the trip) There was no getting rid of them. Every night, I would pray that God would somehow allow me to sleep. That I would be rested in order to do the work that I had been called to do. And God did. It was a miracle.

Even Arachnophobia, one of the most common fears in the world, can be overcome by trusting in God. What didn't make our top ten list, but was #14 on one of the lists I came across, is Atelophobia. Anyone know what this is? Atelophobia is the fear of imperfection or put another way, the fear of not being good enough. I think many of us suffer from this phobia. Probably more people than want to admit it. One of the main characters of our Scripture reading this morning surely struggled with this. Let's hear the story again, and see if we can find signs of Atelophobia.

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 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. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he has finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out in deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 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." 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.

Did you catch the Atelophobia? The fear of imperfection. Of not being good enough. In this story it is found in Simon Peter, one of the disciples, one of the called, the one who ultimately is known as the rock on which the church was built. Simon Peter doubted Jesus and then doubted himself. And his response to Jesus' miracle is to tell Jesus to go away because he is a sinful man. He doesn't believe he is good enough. He doesn't believe he is worthy. I believe many of us feel this way. I know that I have. More than once. When I first received my call to ministry, I did not think I was good enough. I told God that there must be some kind of mistake, that I wasn't cut out for this thing called ministry. Then, when I had my first child, and I was facing coming off maternity leave, I did not think I was good enough. I did not think I could be a good mom and a good pastor. And then again, when I went through my divorce. I didn't think I was good enough. I didn't think I could lead people to wholeness in Christ when I felt so broken. But during each of these times, Jesus responded to me, just as he did to Simon Peter, "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid, Jessica, I am here. I am calling you and I will equip you to this task of ministry. Don't be afraid, Jessica, I am here. I love your children even more than you can imagine, and I will help you to balance motherhood and ministry. Don't be afraid, Jessica, I am here. Your story is not one of brokenness. It is one of healing. And we will overcome. And I knew that it was true. I knew that God could help me to overcome my Atelophobia. My fear of not being good enough. All of those times that God had delivered me from my fear of spiders reinforced my trust in a God who comes alongside of us and helps to see us through.

My friends, sometimes our phobias, our fears, can keep us from following God's call. Have you ever heard the phrase "paralyzed by fear?" Have you ever *felt* paralyzed by fear? Immobilized. Crippled. Stuck. The reality is that fear enslaves us. It binds us in chains. But the good news is that God can break us loose from those chains. We are children of God, and therefore, we no longer have to be slaves to fear. "Fear not" is one of the most repeated phrases in the Bible. In fact, it has been said that there are 365 "fear nots" in the Bible. I do not think it is a coincidence that this would give us one "fear not" message from God for each day of the year. God does not want us to live in fear. We are called to be the light of the world. When we are consumed by worry, fear, and anxiety, it keeps us from living into this call. I pray that you will let go of your fears. The lies that you are not good enough. These fears enslave us in chains. Imagine each fear you have as a heavy chain. Every fear of failure and imperfection piling on and burdening your soul. Do you feel that heaviness? Now imagine those chains being lifted. Feel the lightness. That must be where the phrase "lighten up" comes from. When we lighten up by letting go of fear, worry, and anxiety, that lightness allows us to be a light in the world. And the world needs our light. So, lighten up, my friends. Don't be afraid. God is faithful. Don't be afraid. God is with us. Don't be afraid. God loves you. Amen and Amen.

Thought for the Week Ahead:

"Be brave. Don't be afraid of your weakness, because in Christ crucified, you can do everything."

- St. Catherine of Siena