

Don't be afraid. Your sin is taken away and your guilt atoned for. Amen.

The question of the day is, "Why does God spread his Word with the least qualified being the first sent?"

You heard the Second Reading (Romans 10:12-17). There is this vital chain of events that leads to salvation for sinners. In order to call on the Lord and be saved, people must first believe in him. In order to believe in him, they must first hear about him. In order to hear about him, someone must preach to them. In order for someone to preach to them, that person must first be sent.

If any link in this chain is broken, the sinner is lost (John 3:18). So why does God entrust such an important job to such unqualified people? Why? **Because he says so.** Is that reason enough? Yes. Just look at everything that happens today because Jesus says so.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God (5:1). Why were the people were crowding around Jesus? Because he was speaking the Word of God, and they loved it. They literally pushed him into the water, they were so eager to listen. He had to do something.

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 (5:2-3). Jesus had already met these fishermen (Mark 1:16-20). And because Jesus asked, Simon let Jesus use his boat as a pulpit. It was a reasonable request. But his next request was much less reasonable.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (5:4). I'm not an expert on first century, Judean fishing techniques. But those who are say that everything was wrong with this request.

Number one, you went fishing at night, not in the heat of the day. Number two, you fished in the shallow water, not the deep water. And number three, Simon, a professional fisherman, had spent all night fishing without catching a thing, so the chances of success now were slim.

Which is why you could forgive Simon for saying, "Master, why don't you stick to teaching, and I'll stick to fishing, because what you said is absurd." And you know what? It would have been absurd, except for one thing. And Peter picked up on it.

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" (5:5). **"Because you say so."** It would have been absurd, except for the fact that Peter knew who was talking.

Peter had seen incredible things from Jesus. He was at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). He saw Jesus rebuke his mother-in-law's fever, drive out demons, and heal the sick (Luke 4:38-44). Peter had seen so much, in fact, that he knew, when Jesus speaks, it is as good as done.

Do you know that? In Scripture you have seen incredible things from Jesus – preaching, teaching, healing, raising. In life you've seen incredible things from Jesus – sicknesses come and go, troubles rise and fall, joyful births and peaceful deaths. Most incredible of all – his bloody cross and empty tomb. You've seen that. You've heard that. You know that. Like Peter.

But you don't always respond like Peter. I know I don't. When Jesus says, in his own way, in your own life, "Put out into deep water for a catch," you're skeptical.

After all, Jesus does tell you to believe some pretty absurd things. Like how Baptism washes away sin (John 3:5), or how the Lord's Supper feeds you Christ's body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16). Like how no matter what problems you carried in here today – financial crises, family disasters, health issues – Jesus tells you not to worry, just present your requests to God with prayer and thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6). Man, Jesus tells you that anyone who believes in him will live, even though they die (John 11:25). *That is absurd.*

Except for one thing: **"Because you say so."** You have to know exactly who it is, who makes those promises. Look at this: **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 (5:6-7).**

Against all the odds, contrary to all Peter's experience, Jesus' Word created such a great catch of fish that his net was breaking, that his boat was sinking, that his partners' boat was sinking! Turns out, when Jesus makes a promise, he punctuates it with an exclamation point. Peter did not handle it well.

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 (5:8-10). Peter stood at ground zero of a miracle, up to his armpits in an impossible catch of fish, and he realized exactly who was in the boat with him.

Did you catch it? Earlier Peter called Jesus, **master (5:5)**. Now he called him, **Lord (5:8)**. Peter knew that he was not in the boat with some teacher from Galilee, he was in the boat with God.

And he was scared. **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man" (5:8)**. It is just like Isaiah shouting, "Woe to me! I'm ruined! My eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). These are the confessions of terrified men. They knew whose presence they were in.

Because that is what happens when you come face to face with God and realize that he is holy and that you are not. This is more than recognizing that you're not perfect. Everybody admits that – that they make mistakes and do things that are wrong.

No, *this* is the realization that you sin (Romans 3:23), that you break God's law (1 John 3:4), that you deserve God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3), and that his holiness will burn you alive (Deuteronomy 4:24). Your problem is more than your sin; your problem is the God that you have sinned against (Psalm 51:4).

And if God is your problem, then God is the only One with a solution. **Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people" (5:10)**. Peter didn't need to be afraid. Why? **Because Jesus said so**. His Word showed Peter that the holy God was not standing in that boat with him to obliterate him, but to call him into service.

His Word does the same thing for you. Because this is Jesus talking, who stays with sinners even if that means he has to die for them. Jesus, whose holiness shows your sin, but then takes it from you, makes it his own, and carries it to the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). For it, he is condemned instead of you (Romans 8:3). For it, he is cast from his Father's presence instead of you (Matthew 27:46).

Why would the God who loved you to death in his own death want to leave you? Why would you want to leave him? Listen to this: **So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him (5:11)**.

Instead of Jesus leaving Peter; Peter left everything for Jesus. All of it – the boats, the business, the catch of a lifetime. Why? **Because Jesus said so**. Before this, Jesus was a lone preacher. Now he called others to fish for people with him – ordinary, unqualified, sinful people.

Which brings us back to the question of the day. "Why does God spread his Word with the least qualified being the first sent?" It's absurd! Why doesn't God speak from heaven? Why don't angels deliver his messages?

Well, read the Bible. When God spoke directly to the people, they begged him to stop (Exodus 20:19). When angels delivered messages, the recipients were sore afraid (Luke 2:9).

So God does not speak to you by thundering from heaven, or sending the heavenly host to shock and awe you. Instead, he sends people like Peter to speak to you. God calls ordinary people to spread his Word. God wants one sinner to tell another the greatest words ever spoken: "Don't be afraid. Your sin is taken away and your guilt atoned for."

Jesus has not called you to be an apostle, like Peter. He hasn't called many of you to be pastors or teachers in his church. But every Christian gets to declare "the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

How is that absurd? What joy to know that the God in whose presence you cannot stand brings himself into your presence by his Word and sacraments; that the God who called you and sought you and bought you, forges you as a link in that vital chain of events that leads to salvation for sinners.

The Word that caused the crowds to crowd around Jesus, the Word that commandeered Peter's boat, that created the miracle catch, that removed Peter's fear, that called him into service, that prompted him to leave it all – *that* is the same Word you speak, a message of sins forgiven and heaven open, a message that gives faith, because that's the promise: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).

This is the comfort uncovered for us today: Jesus makes promises and Jesus keeps promises. Why is it this way Lord? **"Because you say so."** Amen.