

# **Sermon Text for January 17, 2016**

*By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Isaiah 6:5-7, Luke 5:1-11

Last Sunday I had an experience that I had never been involved in before in my life. I preached an ordination service for one of our now pastors who was becoming a Reverend at First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster. Knowing the rigid, and I would argue the most rigid requirements the Presbyterian Church has to ordain ministers: a 3 year graduate level degree in Master's of Divinity, so 3 years after a 4 year college degree, the passing of rigid ordination exams, the passing of a psychological examination, the receiving of a calling, all of this I knew, but I wondered how easy is it to get ordained as a pastor in general.

As Brett in fall is going to be headed to Princeton to begin his 3 year graduate level work, I wondered how could he do it easier, and you know, I found one site where there is an online ordination form. All you have to do is fill it out, and boom, you are ordained. They boast that they have ordained: Conan O'Brien, Kathy Griffin, Si Ian McKellen, Joan Rivers, Bryan Cranston, Johnny Carson, Richard Branson, and the list goes on. There really is no prerequisite for becoming a pastor in this world today, just sign up and you are good to go.

Actually, our Scripture today doesn't give degrees as a prerequisite, it doesn't give rigid tests, but rather there is a requirement to not just be ordained, but to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Scriptures identify our primary and principal step in being a follower of Jesus Christ, what we would call a Christian is to be able to say there is something dreadfully wrong with us, or in the words of Simon: "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Let's read.

Luke 5:1-11 is earmarked with the title Jesus calls his first disciples and it is often paired with Paul's explanation of his own calling in I Corinthians 15 as he made his way to Damascus where he recognizes his sinfulness, even inadequacy as he states: "last of all, as one untimely born, he appeared to me." It is matched with the calling of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 6 that we read where he states: "Woe is me. I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips."

In reality the disciples today in Luke have it easy in their call narratives because none is struck blind, none has a burning coal placed on their lips, rather they are rewarded with two boats full of fish. But all of our callings, whether it be to ordained ministry or to a vocation within the secular world, must be approached by a recognition of unworthiness which can only be remedied by the presence and the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at Luke 5:1-11, as we continue along our readings in Luke, we saw Jesus' birth, his time in the temple, John the Baptist, and now the calling of his first disciples. This

Scripture begins by describing Jesus' early ministry, even before the disciples are called, as one where people were flooding to him and press against him so that they could hear the Word of God. I remember a time when we were called ministers of the Word and Sacrament. It is here where we are reminded that our primary task is to preach the Word of God. This is the first time this phrase is used in Luke. In fact Luke uses it 4 times in his Gospel and 14 times in Acts while Mark only has it once and John once as well. So for Luke this phrase Word of God is important, he uses it 18 times when it is only used 2 other times in Scripture. And each time that Luke uses it in the Gospel he refers to Jesus' teachings.

Our preaching and our following of the Word of God is following the teachings of Jesus. This is crucial. We can't randomly pick and choose from that which we want to hear and that which we want to follow. Jesus' words become for us the Word of God.

This is how Peter is introduced to Jesus today as he teaches from one of his borrowed fishing boats that had been on the shore after a full night of unsuccessful fishing. I love the details of Luke. The nets are out of the boats drying in the early morning sun and Jesus comes along and asks for a little help. What happens in vs. 4 is crucial to understanding how we end up with a repentant Simeon who embarks on his own life journey today as a called disciple.

Jesus finishes teaching, Jesus the carpenter's boy from that Podunk town in the Southern End called Nazareth, from which nothing good comes out. This Jesus leans over to Peter, the professional fisherman who has been up all night to no avail trying to catch fish and was kind enough to let you use his boat as a pulpit, hey, why don't you try throwing the net over there. You know, that 150 pound net that is drying in the sun for another day, put it back on the boat in front of all these people gathered and throw it out over there. Go ahead.

Now I don't want to say that Simon whines, but we've been up all night and didn't get a thing. Why should Simon listen to this guy he has just met and do something he probably would never do for anyone else? His answer gives it away. How does he respond to Jesus? He addresses Jesus as Master, only Luke uses this term for a disciple describing our Savior. All the others use didaskolon, teacher, or rabbouni, rabbi. But the term Master helps us to understand that Peter had already conferred upon Jesus a certain authority that previously he did not have.

Master, it's been a long night, but because you have said so, I'll try it. Peter recognizes a certain authority in Jesus even in this first stage of their relationship.

So when he threw his net and caught the fish, yelled for help and was to the point of almost sinking two boats, he realized who called him and what his calling was. At this point it is not Simon's skills that are at issue, the issue is his life, his obedience to the Savior which will in

turn make him in the old school words: I will make you fishers of men. We might expect Peter to defend his credibility as a fisherman rather than apologize for his sinfulness, but when he realizes the authority of Jesus, nothing else matters.

The story finishes as you would expect with the contrite Peter in front of our Savior asking for Jesus to not waste his time with him for he is not worthy. We find the same approach in Luke repeated over and over again. Mary earlier states I am the handmaiden of the Lord when confronted with her calling. John the Baptist professed that he is unworthy to even untie Jesus' sandal, the centurion in chapter 7 tells Jesus: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." The Lord likes that approach.

Our reaction to the presence of Jesus who is calling us to a specific task Luke tells us should be one of unashamed servitude to the master. And that is exactly the approach that Simon takes. As a response to this servitude, as a response to this very clear subjugation of himself to God's will, how does Jesus respond? Look at vs. 10, do not be afraid. Oh, what a message for today as we live in fear like we have never lived in fear before. This is Luke's absolutely favorite statement. Who have we seen that the Almighty, in just these first 5 chapters, has addressed them and told them do not be afraid. The disciples who are getting ready to embark on the journey of their life in following the Savior?

Let's try to remember in Luke: Let's do a little study – turn to Luke 1:12 here we find Zechariah who is embarking on being the father in his old age to John the Baptist and the angel tells him: Do not be afraid. Then turn to Luke 1:30 where Mary is confronted by the angel Gabriel as she is about to embark to be the mother of our Savior Jesus Christ and she begins with him telling her: Do not be afraid, Mary. Then we find in Luke 2:9 the shepherds who are about to embark on a journey to be the first outsiders to see the Savior of the world and they are told, do not be afraid. And now Simon, as he is about to embark, along with James and John, is about to begin their 3 year journey as disciples of Jesus Christ, to follow him even to their own death as martyrs, with John, the son of Zebedee the one who would write not only a Gospel but also Revelation, Jesus sends them on this journey with the words: Do not be afraid.

Do you hear these words of God whispered to you? You can only hear them if you are able to take the stance of Peter who tells Jesus to go away because he is not worthy. The officers who are going away on a retreat this next weekend need to have that same approach, we are not worthy. But also those of us sitting in the pews, there can be no sense of entitlement. None of us should ever feel like we deserve to be sitting in these seats but rather should understand that we

are not worthy, it is only by the blood of the lamb that makes us worthy and that in turn allows us to live our lives without fear. Because Jesus said so.

Being a Christian is not a status symbol, it is a reminder of our unworthiness and our call to be the least of these in a society and a culture that is always looking to get ahead. We live in a country where our Christian faith is used as a pawn to get votes by claiming to be a Presbyterian from Manhattan or a Methodist from Chappaqua. Our faith has been a source of pride, of coercion ever since a guy named Constantine walked the earth.

But Simon here recognizes Jesus' authority and he was willing to leave it all behind to follow him, for a life of complete sacrifice. The humility it takes to do that is required of us all. This church, this Presbytery, this nation, even this denomination could learn from those who have left all to serve in order to become fishers of men. May God bless us and keep us as we look to fulfill all of our callings with an inexhaustible source of humility. Amen.