

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
February 7, 2010

## ***Lord Jesus, Make Me a Fisher of Men!***

*Luke 5:1-11*

*One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people 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. 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, 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 catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

In Jesus' name, dear partners in Gospel ministry,

Lots of people have come up to me over the last two weeks saying, "Hi, I'm Pete Panitzke." I am enjoying that little joke. For those of you who weren't here two weeks ago, I encouraged everyone to "SALT" the people in our church lobby.

"S" stands for "Say Something." I mentioned that I typically say, "Hi, I'm Pete Panitzke, one of the pastors here at St. Paul's. I can't put a name with your face." I guess for some of you, I should have explained that you are supposed to use your own name. ☺

"A" stands for "Ask questions." If they are a guest, you might ask what brought them to St. Paul's, if they live in the area, etc.

"L" stands for "Listen carefully." Listen for their interests or needs that they might have.

"T" stands for "Take it deeper." In a church lobby conversation, that "take it deeper" can be something as simple as offering to show them around our campus, showing them where the nursery is, or asking if they would like to sit with you in church.

But that same “SALT” acronym is useful in our daily conversations as well. As you meet people and interact with them at work or school, say something, ask questions to get to know them, show them respect by listening to them carefully, and then seek an opportunity to take it deeper, specifically to lead the conversation to the most important person in your life.

Now when it comes to witnessing, perhaps it is especially a Lutheran phenomenon, or maybe it is church wide, but many times we find ourselves acting a lot like Moses when he was called to lead the people out of Egypt (Exodus 3 & 4). He had lots of great objections, but the Lord answered them all.

Our text for today does the same thing. When we say, “I can’t talk about Jesus,” Jesus overcomes our objections. So let’s take a look. We’ll actually start at the end of the lesson.

The first objection that comes to my mind is, **“Who am I to speak?”**

There are lots of reasons I can give for not speaking up. The first is that I’m too sinful. “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Why would anyone want to listen to me?

The answer is: **Remember Jesus’ call.** Jesus called a sinful man like Peter to be a fisher of men. Jesus knows your sins. But part of God’s grace is that he uses sinful people in his plan of salvation. He doesn’t let Peter off the hook because he is sinful. He says, “I will make you a fisher of men.”

The same is true of us. In fact, the more you see yourself as a sinner, the more you will appreciate Jesus as the Savior of sinners. Remember the sinful woman in Luke 7. She came in and washed Jesus’ feet with perfume and dried them with her hair. Jesus explained, “Her many sins have been forgiven – that’s why she loves much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47 paraphrase).

Sinners like Peter, sinners like us, have been given the call to be fishers of men. “You shall be my witnesses.” That’s the response you can give to Satan when he seeks to silence you. I am to speak about Jesus because Jesus has called me to speak.

The next objection is, **“I can’t speak. I’m too afraid.”** But what are we afraid of? That we’ll say the wrong thing? That we’ll lead people to hell? There you are giving yourself too much credit and not giving God enough credit. Trust that the Holy Spirit can give you the words to speak.

What are we afraid of? That others will look down on you because you are a Jesus freak? Who cares? If God is with us, who cares who is against us? **Remember Jesus’ promise:** “Don’t be afraid.” As you read your Bibles, highlight the many times that God speaks to his fearful people saying, “I am with you.” Don’t be afraid. Jesus himself is with you.

The third objection is the one that I want to spend the most time on today. **“What will I say?”** My encouragement to you is: **Remember Jesus’ training.**

Jesus has been training you from the very first day that you heard of him. Remember your training.

In the outline on the back of the worship folder, I have another little outline for a conversation: “Their story. Your story. Jesus’ story.” As you SALT someone, you listen to their story. Especially as you take it deeper, you listen to their spiritual story. Where are they? Are they searching? Are they questioning their faith? Are they angry with God?

By listening, you earn the opportunity to speak. Often I’ve found that it is a good time to tell “My story.” And I try to mold my story as a response to their story. If they have suffered the loss of a loved one, I have too and I can relate. If they feel overwhelmed with guilt, I can relate my story to that. But it takes a willingness to be open.

This summer as part of a summer school course, I toured a ministry in west Chicago. I was amazed at how often the pastor would stop and ask someone in the ministry, “Share your testimony with the group.” The reason why these testimonies were so powerful is that they admitted their failings and how Christ now means so much to them. Some of them were recovering addicts and spoke briefly of God’s rescue from that addiction. Others admitted that they had made some dumb choices as teens, but God reached out to them. Don’t be afraid to admit to people that you aren’t perfect. Remember, Jesus only came to save sinners. If we want to reach out to the sinner, let’s admit to them that we too are sinners that Jesus has reached out to and saved.

Then your story very easily can lead into Jesus’ story.

I’ve found two key questions to be very helpful. I ask the person if I can ask them a kind of personal question. “If you were to die today, do you know for sure where you would be?” Often the answer that is given, “I wish I could be sure.” Or “I’m pretty sure.” Affirm that answer. “Many people feel that way. But God really wants us to be sure. Let me ask another question, ‘If God asked you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” what would you say?’”

Not often will a person answer, “Because Jesus died for me.” More often this second question is answered by something like, “I’ve tried to do my best.” “I’m a pretty good person.”

That’s when this little outline of “The Great Exchange” can be helpful. Now I don’t carry one of these with me at all times. I don’t expect you to either. But this can give you an outline for your conversation about your faith.

Many people do think, “I’m a pretty good person.” But then explain that God doesn’t ask us to be pretty good. He demands that we be perfect. That means no sin. No negative. And it means absolutely perfect obedience. All positive.

The second panel of “The Great Exchange” deal with our man-made responses to sin. I do more good than bad. I’ll try harder. I’m better than other people. James 2:10 is a great passage to remember, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

The third panel is the heart of “The Great Exchange.” Jesus lived a perfect life for us. The lamb without blemish or defect. He is even called in Jeremiah, “The LORD our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 25:6). That perfect life God credits to us. And our sins are credited to Jesus. He is “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Panel four explains how this becomes ours. Faith in Jesus. Believe that it is so. And you can share how you need to hear this message over and over again because it is so hard for you to remember that God really does look at you and see you as perfect for Jesus' sake. That's why you read the Bible, go to church, etc.

The last panel simply shows some of the blessings that flow to us if we know that Jesus took our sin and gave us his perfect standing with God. Our faith is not just a "pie in the sky by and by" faith. Yes, we look forward to heaven, but we have so many wonderful benefits to our faith right now. Remember what you know about this person and show how God promises to help them deal with whatever problem they face.

Now I want you to know that I have rarely had a conversation that flows just like this. It is a great outline to have in my mind. But all along, I'm listening to people. Where are they? Are burdened with sin already? Jump right into "The Great Exchange" panel. I have this outline in my mind, but I'm not forced to keep to it.

The most important thing I could encourage you to do to share you faith is the Nike slogan.  
**JUST DO IT!**

**JUST DO IT!** Practice. Practice on your home turf. That's what connector groups are. Large group Bible studies are nice because they generally require very little of you. You sit silently and not really participate. You just absorb. But small group studies, where there are only six or ten of you, you participate more. You are actually practicing talking about Jesus. Get into a small group study – check your interest in a Connector Group – and practice.

**JUST DO IT!** Practice with others. The best practice, the best learning situation is when you try to share your faith with someone, and it doesn't work out quite right. That's what happens in every football game. In the Super Bowl this afternoon, some plays won't work out quite right. Often you see the coaches talking to the linemen or the quarterback looking at pictures. They learn from their mistakes, and then they try it again.

**JUST DO IT!**

The last objection I want to deal with is: **Will it really make any difference?** You know lots of people that really don't hear what you have to say. **But remember Jesus' power.** The disciples had fished all night long and had caught nothing. But Jesus knew exactly where the fish were and when they would be there – even though it wasn't the "right time" in the disciples' minds.

So you, your Savior is the one who is in charge of our fishing. Trust that he will work through the Word that you share to accomplish his purposes. In a video that I watched, someone claimed that it might take up to 40 times for a person to hear the great exchange before it finally sinks in. Perhaps you are the first one to share that news. Perhaps you are the 20<sup>th</sup> one. Perhaps you are the 40<sup>th</sup> one. Trust that Jesus has the power to work through you to accomplish his saving will.

Now, brothers and sisters, you have the call to be Jesus' witnesses. You have his promise that he will be with you. That is his answer to your fears. You have his training. There will always be more to learn, but use what you already know. And God will work through you to the saving of many lives. You are holy in God's sight because your failures and sins were placed on Jesus. And his perfect fishing record has been credited to you. Go and share that great exchange. Amen.