

5th Sunday after Epiphany
February 9, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Least Qualified are the First Chosen

Luke 5:1-11 (EHV)

One time, while the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. ²He saw two boats there along the lakeshore. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³Jesus got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. He sat down and began teaching the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch."

⁵Simon answered him, "Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. ⁷They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord." ⁹For Peter and all those with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, "Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people."

¹¹After they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Several years ago, a television adaptation of the Gospels began. It is called, The Chosen, since it focused on Jesus and his chosen disciples. My wife and I made it up to the Sermon on the Mount but haven't seen any more episodes. As with all movies and television series about the life of Christ, it had some good parts and some bad parts. Anytime you watch any of these kinds of shows that tell a story from the Bible, make sure you go back and review the Bible along with the movie. Then you will know what is accurate, true and what is conjecture or just plain wrong in the show.

An interesting part of The Chosen series is how they tried to humanize the disciples by showing their faults. They portrayed Peter's life before he met Jesus as a gambler and lawbreaker. He was seen gambling on fistfights. He made some kind of deal with the Roman authorities because he was behind on his taxes and began fishing illegally and on the Sabbath if I remember correctly. I understand that the producers of The Chosen wanted to make Simon Peter more relatable so that people would think, "If Jesus chose a man like Peter, maybe he'll chose me with all my faults and sins too." But the gambling and deals with the Romans and fishing illegally is nowhere in the Bible. And you don't need to embellish the true, biblical account to make the same point. The Least Qualified are the First Chosen.

Put yourself in the place of Jesus for just a moment. What kind of person would you choose to be one of your twelve disciples? Perhaps we would look for characteristics like: trusting, faithful, humble, diligent, compassionate, patient, kind, loving, merciful, an expert in the Scriptures, well-liked by the people, and so on. And who did Jesus chose?

Simon Peter may not have been a gambler, but his words and actions sometimes showed pride and impatience. He did not always think before he spoke. And he was a fisherman, not a biblical scholar. Yet, Jesus chose him.

Andrew was also a fisherman and Peter's brother. We are not told much about him except that he was also chosen.

James and John were brothers and fellow fisherman with Andrew and Peter. They showed their

lack of compassion, patience and kindness when they wanted fire to come from heaven and burn up some Samaritans who said mean things. And Jesus chose James and John.

After three years of following Jesus, Philip did not understand that Jesus was the Son of God the Father and that by knowing Jesus they knew the Father as well. And Jesus chose Philip.

Bartholomew or Nathanael didn't think any good could come from Nazareth. Yet Jesus of Nazareth chose Bartholomew.

Then Jesus makes a great choice because everyone loves a tax collector. And Jesus chooses Matthew or Levi to follow him.

Thomas would not trust the words of Jesus about his resurrection or the eyewitness testimony of the other disciples on Easter and now has the unfortunate nickname of Doubting Thomas. Jesus chose Thomas too.

Then we have James the son of Alphaeus about whom we know very little. Jesus chose this little-known man too.

Next was another man named Simon who was called the Zealot. Jewish zealots were involved in plans to overthrow Roman rule by force. Not the sort of man you want among your closest friends when trying to avoid Roman interference with your ministry. But Jesus chose this Simon the Zealot too.

And then we have two men named Judas. One is usually forgotten. The other is infamous as the betrayer of Christ. And Jesus chose them.

No great scholars of the Old Testament. No leading Pharisees or Sadducees. No members of the Sanhedrin. No one from a well-known family with powerful connections. Just a collection of everyday people who needed a Savior because they were all sinners.

Peter feels this in his soul when Jesus fills their nets with fish in the gospel for today. Peter, Andrew, James and John knew how to catch fish. If they didn't catch fish, they and their families did not have anything to eat or to sell in the markets. They tried all night to catch fish in the best place they knew. Jesus tells them to cast out the nets during the day, a time they didn't think the fish would be around, and in a place they did not usually catch fish. The nets were so full that they began to break. Peter already knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Now he knew it deep inside. He was in the presence of the Holy and Almighty God. And he confesses: "Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord."

We should react like Peter when we truly realize who Jesus is. He is the one who knows where the fish are in the Sea of Galilee and where all the fish are in all the oceans of the world. Not only does he know where all the creatures of the seas are, but he created the very first fish of the sea. He is the one who gave the breath of life to the first man, and he is the God who can take it away. If he knows where the fish are, he knows where I've been. If he knows where everything is, he knows what I've thought. I don't know what sins came to Peter's mind when he was face to face with the Son of God, and I don't know your sins of thought, word and action, but I do know that we all have to confess with Peter: I am a sinful person. For compared with the holy and perfect Son of God, all that we do falls short. We are full of sin. Away from us, Lord. We are not worthy to be in your presence. We are not worthy of being called to follow you.

None of the twelve disciples could claim to be worthy of being called to follow Christ. Their call to follow is by God's grace alone. Jesus made the choice to call them by his grace and mercy, not because he saw something special in them. What good news for us who have spoken foolishly before thinking like Peter, who have called down judgment instead of showing compassion like James and John, who are nobodies in the eyes of the world like James the son of Alphaeus, and for us who at one time may have even turned away from Christ for a little earthly gain like Judas. Christ chose all of them and he has chosen you to follow him.

After Christ's resurrection, those twelve, with the exception of Judas who refused to repent, went out to catch people with the gospel. By baptizing and teaching, believers were gathered as followers of Christ generation after generation. Christ was choosing each child who was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He was choosing each person who was made alive through the proclamation of the gospel. And you who are baptized, all who believe in Christ, were at one time chosen by him to be given faith, forgiveness and eternal salvation. He did not choose you based on what you had done or your potential for doing good in the future. He did not choose you based on whether or not you would believe. He chose you and therefore you believe. Christ chose you and therefore you are forgiven by his blood shed for you. Christ chose you to follow him now and into eternity.

So, be like those fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Each day, follow the Savior who wanted sinful people to be his closest friends. Each day, leave behind those things that would keep you from following the Savior who chose you before the creation of the world to be saved. Each day, rejoice that although we are all among the least qualified to follow the Son of God, Christ has chosen us by his grace and mercy. You are the chosen.

Amen.