

**Isaiah 6:1-8** <sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." <sup>4</sup> The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup> The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." <sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

**Luke 5:1-11** <sup>1</sup> Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5:1-11  
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"Clean Coal and Fresh Fish"  
Rev. Amy Terhune

"There is a ridiculous old story about a fisherman who was enormously successful. Each morning he would take his small boat out on the lake and within a few hours he would return with a boat loaded with fish. People wondered, how did he do it?

"One day a stranger showed up and asked the man if he could go along the next time the man went out fishing. The man said, "Sure. Meet me here tomorrow morning at 5:00 and we will go out."

"So the next morning the two of them made their way through the early morning mist to a small cove where the fisherman stopped the boat and cut off the motor. The stranger wondered where the man's fishing equipment was. He had no rod and reel. All the stranger saw was a small net and a rusty tackle box.

"Slowly the man pulled the tackle box over to himself, opened it, and took out a red stick of dynamite. Taking a match, he lit the fuse of the dynamite, held it for a moment and heaved it into the water. There was a terrific blast. Soon, the fisherman was dipping up fish in his small net and filling up the boat.

"After watching this, the stranger reached into his hip pocket and pulled out his wallet. Opening it up, he flashed a badge—the badge of a game warden. Somberly he said, "You're under arrest."

"This didn't seem to rattle the fisherman in the least. He reached into the tackle box, pulled out another stick of dynamite, lit it, held it for a moment while the fuse burned on down, then handed it to the

game warden. "Now," he said, "Are you just going to sit there or are you going to fish?" [6 ¶s from illustrations, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).]

With all due respect to the game warden, I imagine Jesus asking us the same question this morning. Are you going to sit there or are you going to fish? Because fishing is what we're supposed to be doing. Fishing for people, that is. Fishing for people. There's a part of me that has never been comfortable with that concept. Maybe it's because my gut impulse is to analyze it a little too literally. After all, I know what happens when one goes fishing. I cast a line out into the water with bait on it. Some poor unsuspecting fish bites the lure and is reeled up out of the water—it's natural habitat—to flop around in agony on the dock until all the life is gone from the thing. That's a lousy model for evangelism, don't you think? Yet, historically speaking, it has sometimes been precisely what has happened.

Fortunately, further study on this passage suggests that this isn't really what Jesus has in mind. So let's dig in a bit, and see if there isn't a word of challenge and hope for us today. I believe there is. The details of the story are simple enough.

Unlike Matthew or Mark, Luke reports that this story takes place after Jesus has begun his public ministry. In Luke 4, Jesus begins to preach around Galilee, and vs. 14 reports that word about him spread through the region. He performs several miracles in Capernaum—enough that the hometown crowd in Nazareth has heard about it and wants an encore. When he leaves Nazareth, he continues to roam the countryside preaching and begins to gather quite a crowd—enough of a crowd, in fact, that when chapter 5 opens, the crowd on the beach is so thick, it's pushing him out into the water. That's why he gets on a boat. Simon Peter, at that point, is one of the crowd. Who knows what he thinks of this Jesus? Enough to let Jesus preach from his boat, perhaps, but that's about the extent of it. Peter is washing and mending nets, sort of half listening as he works.

Notice: Jesus comes to Simon Peter, and James and John, right where they were. The call on their lives is not issued in the middle of a worship service or on the Sabbath at the synagogue. It comes while they're on the job. It comes after they've had a really lousy night—caught nothing! They are three discouraged and defeated men. It comes while they're fixing their nets. That's hardly the place one expects to hear a calling. And the language Jesus uses to call them is the language they know—fishing.

Now, I find that to be a heartening thought. Jesus comes to us where we are, too. I love the story that William G. Carter tells about a graduate school student in Pittsburgh, looking for a part-time job. "A newspaper listed an administrative position with a soup kitchen. That looked interesting, so she clipped it and prepared for the interview. On the day of her interview, she put on a dark blue business suit, put together a manila folder full of resumes and references, and clipped back her hair.

"Arriving a few minutes before noon, she saw the sign: "East End Cooperative Ministry." She knocked on the door. Someone inside said, "It's unlocked." She went in, only to find a long line of people in front of her. Disappointment washed over her. Then she realized it was lunch time. The people in the line weren't there for the same interview, they were waiting for soup.

"She grew nervous as she looked at the people in line. Some of them, in turn, looked at her. She felt self-conscious about the way she was dressed. Apparently others began to sense her anxiety. A woman in a moth-eaten sweater smiled and tried to make conversation. "Is this your first time here?"

"Yes, it is."

"Don't worry," said the lady in the sweater, "it gets easier."

"The scales fell from my eyes that day," reflected the young woman. "I went there looking for a job, and that woman thought I was there for soup. As far as she knew, the world had been as cruel to me as it was to her. But in the kindest way she could, she welcomed me as a fellow human being. She saw me as someone equally in need, which I was and still am. I didn't realize it at the time, but that was the day when God began to convert me." [6 ¶s from *No Box Seats in the Kingdom*, William G. Carter, CSS Publishing Company, Inc. Illustrations on [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).]

That young lady wasn't looking for God. But God was looking for her. God met her where she least expected it, when she least expected, and how she most needed it. That young woman, like Peter, James, and John, was down on her luck, looking for work, and minding her own business. God met her where she was. And God turned her experiences into empathy for humankind. "The issue is not that we

should become more aggressive about sharing our faith. It is that we should be more sensitive to the needs of the world around us, and more sensitive to the subtle prodding of the Holy Spirit. The two sensitivities are wonderfully intertwined. To be sensitive to the Holy Spirit must mean that we will be more sensitive to people and their pain; to be more sensitive to people ought to make us more open to God and his purposes." [from J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Reading the Signs, "From Empty Nets to Full Lives,"* CSS, 1988, p. 81-82.]

Jesus meets us where we're at. And then he challenges us to trust. "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch," Jesus says. And Peter might well have answered him, "Lord, you know a good deal 'bout speaking in public and teaching God's word and spreading salvation, but I'm the professional fisherman here and I know that you don't catch fish in broad daylight. You stick to your business, and leave me to mine." But Peter didn't say that. You know he thought about it. "Lord, we've worked all night, and we haven't caught anything." You know he almost said out loud what everybody knows he had to be thinking. But he doesn't. Instead, he says, "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Jesus challenges us to trust, and Peter accepts the challenge. And it is a challenge. Things do not always go as planned. In fact, sometimes, things go horribly wrong. Trust is that indefinable quality that hangs on because the only other choice is despair.

"Irwin Shaw wrote a short story called *The Eighty-Yard Run*. As a college freshman, at his first football game, he broke loose for an 80-yard touchdown run. His teammates looked at him with awe. His coach said, "You're going to have quite a future around here." His girlfriend awarded him with a kiss after the game. Irwin Shaw has the feeling that life is completely satisfying and rewarding.

"But nothing in the rest of his life ever lives up to that day again. His football experience is equally disappointing. His marriage sours. The pain of failure is even greater because he remembers thinking on a perfect day many years before that life would always be that pleasant, satisfying and rewarding.

"Life does not stand still. There isn't a once-for-all experience. It was Winston Churchill who said, "Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It is courage that counts."

"There are going to be bad days. Sometimes we are going to fall on our respective faces. These failures don't have to be endings. They can be the avenues to experience God's grace more widely and more deeply. [4 ¶s from James T. Garrett, *God's Gift*, CSS Publishing Company, illustration on [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).] They are the days when we, like Peter, suck in another breath and say, "yet if you say so, Lord. Deep water or bust."

I know people, maybe some who are here this morning, whose lives are miserable, because for years they have refused to risk anything. They have resources but do not use them, skills but do not develop them, dreams but do not follow them, gifts but do not share them, ideas but do not disclose them, possessions but do not dedicate them—because they are afraid to do anything, give anything, risk anything, stand for anything, sacrifice for anything, or expect anything. So they sit quietly in the middle of their boat, in the shallow waters, where there are no fish, and complain, are dissatisfied, bored and wonder why nothing happens. [idea here adapted significantly from "When Your Nets Are Empty" by Charles H. Bayer, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).] Simon Peter put out into deep water, and God provided far more abundantly than he could have asked or imagined. God comes to us where we are. God challenges us to trust. God challenges us to act.

"For Peter, the real change that occurred that day was not his luck in fishing. The real change would occur when he got to shore... Falling to his knees, he cries out, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." Peter always seems to know, intuitively, what's going on. He doesn't want to get any closer to Jesus. He wants Jesus to go away. He is not worthy. [from "Eager For The Journey" by Brett Blair, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).]

But Jesus doesn't let him stay on his knees. He says to him and to James and John—"don't be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people." And the story closes with a dramatic word. "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."

Such is the love of Christ. The beginning of life with Christ is the acknowledgement that we are not what we should be or could be—none of us. The continuing of our Christian life is an awareness of what we might yet be by the power of Christ. Jesus challenge is to act, to change, to strike out in a new direction.

I'm going to close this morning by relaying an experience of Rev. King Duncan, editor of *Dynamic Preaching*. It was one of those experiences that really gave me a jolt as I read his description. Let him tell it in his own words:

"I was getting dressed one Sunday morning to speak at old First Church—a high-steeple church with a rich history. The radio was on. The early morning service from a fast growing Pentecostal church was being broadcast. I knew the pastor. He is not a great preacher—a little too emotional for my liking. But he knows how to reach people no one else can reach.

"As I straightened my tie, I heard him say, 'Before we begin this morning, I want to say a couple of things to you. First of all, I want to say that there is far too much moving around in the service while I am preaching. It's distracting.' I thought that was a rather amusing thing for him to say on radio. Then he added, 'And another thing. I would appreciate it if you would wait till after the service is over to go out to the restroom.' I thought to myself, 'Is he really saying this on radio?' Then to make matters worse he added, 'I have to wait till the service is over to go to the restroom and so can you!' I let out a hearty laugh. That's not the sort of thing most of us would broadcast as part of a worship service. Smugly I finished tying my tie and laughed inwardly about this unsophisticated messenger of the Gospel.

"Then the voice of God spoke to my heart. 'King,' God said, 'the reason that pastor has to tell his people how to behave in church is that a year ago many of them were not in a church. Some of them were having serious problems with alcohol and drugs. They were prostitutes and pimps. They were gang members and troubled kids and marginalized people. They were in crack-houses and half-way houses and jail cells. That's why they don't know how to act in church. They haven't been in church very long.' Then God said, 'Don't worry, King, you won't have that difficulty at old First Church.'" And I thought to myself, 'God help us, we won't. Everybody at old First church will know exactly how to behave in church.' And I couldn't help thinking that might be the most tragic thing that can be said about any congregation'." [3 ¶s adapted from "How Do You Act In The Presence Of The Queen?" by King Duncan, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).]

Well, folks, we're a lot more like old First Church here than we are like that church on the radio, aren't we? Evidence seems to suggest that most of you know how to behave in church. This, in itself, isn't a problem. The question is, would we, could we, welcome one who doesn't know how to behave in church? Those folks that had no idea how to behave in church—they had left behind everything to follow. To be sure, most of them left behind destructive habits, dead-end lives, and hopeless downward spirals. Their entire way of life shifted radically. Has ours? Do we dare assume that because our lives are not as marred by so many bad decisions, that we have no destructive habits, dead-ends, or downward spirals to leave behind? I think not. There is a world around us, a neighbor, a student, a friend, a coworker, somebody in our lives that needs us to put out into deep water and risk our empathy, our hope, our encouragement, our companionship on the journey. This is what it means to fish for people.

And so the question hangs there. The power of God is in our hands. Are we going to just sit there? Or are we going to fish?