

## **“Jesus Does Peter a Favor”**

10 February 2019: 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

Salado UMC—Salado, Texas 76571

Preaching Text: Luke 5:1-11

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### **“Do not fear death so much, but rather the inadequate life”**

(Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother*, 1932).

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Today there is a delusion that operates in many churches across our land. It is the delusion that we have come to church today to find God. Yet, often people come to church because it is the easiest place to escape God. It is a truth that many preachers/theologians have pointed out across the centuries. With the church’s frequently pat answers and the art of avoiding life’s hard questions, church easily becomes the best place in town to hide from God. Paul Tillich once wrote about encountering God: “[People] of all kinds, prophets and reformers, saints and atheists, believers and unbelievers, have the same experience. It is safe to say that a [person] who has never tried to flee from God has never experienced the God Who is really God.” Thus, fear and encountering God becomes our footing today.

Fear is the cornerstone of our Bible lesson for today. We all know about fear. When I was an elementary student, there was a name that struck fear into our elementary hearts. The name was Bill Davenport. Bill’s reputation was as the toughest, meanest hombre in our town of Independence, Missouri. All the kids lived in fear that someday Bill Davenport would come and find us and do us in. Remarkably enough, although we lived in this fear for years, even to the point of sleepless nights, I do not ever remember seeing Bill Davenport in the flesh. Neither did any of my frightened friends. Fear has this effect on people. Often fear of things we may never, in fact, encounter stricken us. Perhaps this is why Franklin Roosevelt remarked, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Today’s lesson pertains to Peter’s fear of an encounter with God’s messiah Jesus. Also, it reminds us how Jesus ignored Peter’s request: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Hear our morning’s text from Luke:

**Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and 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 way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”**

**6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning 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 that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 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.” 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him (Luke 5:1-11).**

About two-thirds of the way into our text, in verse 8, Peter responds to Jesus’ directive. The directive was to put the nets back into the water although the fisherfolk soon to be disciples, had already fished all night with little success. In a moment of personal self-judgment, Peter recognizes in Jesus more-than-human power. In the boat, when Peter saw Jesus’ authority face to face, Peter conceded God’s power at work. It was a moment of truth for Peter—and a moment of pure terror. Exposed to God’s power, related via the Bible to its readers, produces in our reading experience moments of pure terror for biblical characters. There are many examples of this phenomenon in scripture. For example, in the primordial garden, after the man and woman disobeyed God, human instinct directed them to hide. The man said to Yahweh, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). When Moses encountered God in the Midian wilderness, Exodus tells us that Yahweh said, “ ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6). Sometimes, even nature itself fears this creator God. Psalm 77:16 reads:

**When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.**

The notion of fear is everywhere in scripture. Thus, we should not be surprised that in the boat Peter pleads: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Peter responds in an aptly human/biblical way. Yet, Jesus ignores Peter’s request. Jesus has bigger plans for Peter than Peter knows. Jesus grants Peter a big favor by not giving Peter what Peter thinks he wants. Rather, Jesus gives him a task to grow into.

Have you ever thought that it was not the bad that Jesus saved you from that caused your great fear of life? Have you ever considered that it might be what Jesus was saving you for that gave you fear? There is a difference between Jesus saving you from something and saving you for something. When a fire trapped John Wesley as a child at the Epworth rectory (see: Amos 4:11), Wesley had an overwhelming sense that God had saved him not only from the fire, but that God had saved him for a purpose much greater than himself.

When Joseph Stalin (dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR] from 1929 to 1953) was at the height of his power as the Soviet premier, he was plainly afraid to go to bed. He had seven different bedrooms, and each he could lock each tightly. He slept in a different one each night in order to foil any would-be assassins. He had five different chauffeur-driven limousines, each with curtains closed so that no one could tell which he was in. So deep-seated were his fears that he employed a servant whose only job was to monitor and protect his tea bags. The message is obvious. Happiness does not come from outer security. Happiness comes from an inner stability, the inner strength that comes only from God’s presence in our lives.

Peter was afraid. Of what we can never absolutely be sure. What we can be sure of is this: Jesus had bigger plans for Peter than he could have ever imagined. So, the next time you are afraid of God’s

presence, ask yourself: Am I afraid of my past failures before God? Or am I afraid of the new tasks that God will give me as a forgiven and redeemed child of God.

I have a pastor friend of deep faith, Thomas Lane Butts, Jr. Tom was well acquainted with a man doctors diagnosed with Huntington's disease in this man's early fifties in South Alabama. This gentleman and his wife prayed and prayed for healing. Twenty years later, he is in the last debilitating stages of his disease. Yet, he once told Tom that God answered his prayers. He whispered in all sincerity, "I have been healed, not of Huntington's disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Huntington's disease." Bertolt Brecht once wrote: "Do not fear death so much, but rather the inadequate life" (*The Mother*, 1932). Amen.

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