

11 July 2012
Pentecost 6 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus Dwells With Sinners”

Text: Luke 5:1-11 (1 Kings 19:11-21; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

That’s what Peter said when, filled with much fear and trembling, he fell down at Jesus’ knees. He was right. And he was wrong.

He was right in that he was a sinful man. Most certainly. Even more than he knew. Suddenly being in the presence of the mighty power of God who can produce a miraculous catch of fish made that burden a crushing one. But maybe it was also more than that. For he was not just in the presence of a mighty God, but a gracious God, who was being gracious *to him*, and he knew he didn’t deserve it. Perhaps over the course of the past night of failure Peter had lashed out at his co-workers, spoken things he should not have said, and maybe even cursed God for not helping them catch even a few stinkin’ fish! *Really? Couldn’t you provide even a few? Nothing?*

And then there He is, in the boat with Him. [Gulp!] ***Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.***

But there’s where Peter was wrong. The reason that Jesus was there is because Peter was a sinful man. The reason Jesus came down from heaven and was born as a man, the reason He grew up in submission to His parents, the reason why He was baptized and began a public ministry which would lead to His crucifixion on the cross, the reason He was there in Galilee that day and in Peter’s boat, is because Peter was a sinful man. Jesus came to be with sinners. Jesus came to befriend sinners. Jesus came to save sinners. Peter was a sinful man, so that’s right where Jesus wanted to be. And no, He wasn’t leaving.

That’s something Peter had to learn. It’s something we’re still trying to learn. That Jesus dwells only with sinners. And the bigger sinner you are, the more Jesus would like to come and be with you. So that He can take your sin, give you His forgiveness, and raise you to a new life. Not because you deserve it or have somehow deserved Him in your boat - but because He is loving and gracious and has come to save. Even those of us who have lashed out at others a time or two, spoken things that should not be said, and even been angry with God for how things have been turning out lately. Jesus came for you.

We keep trying to prove we're worth it, though. Jesus did so much for us, *we'll make you proud Jesus! You won't regret it!* . . . But that doesn't work, does it? At least, not for long. Do you *really* think Jesus is proud of you and how well you've been doing in your Christian life? Or if we assessed ourselves honestly, *shouldn't* He be closer to regret? Was I really worth Jesus dying for?

Looking at ourselves, we'd perhaps answer that NO! But Jesus says YES! You were worth it. You were worth every last pain, every last lash, every last drop of blood, every last breath. Jesus has no regrets. In fact, He'd do it all again if He had to, if He needed to. That's how much He loves you and how precious you are to Him! But He doesn't need to. His one death and resurrection is all that you need. You're forgiven. You are His child. And He is delighted.

So ***Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord?*** Nope. Jesus isn't going anywhere. He came to be with you and dwell with you. He came for sinners, and He's stayin'. And so in response to Peter's confession, instead of jumping out of the boat and walking away, Jesus says ***Do not be afraid.*** Jesus wants to be there. He wants to forgive. And He wants to be here, with you, for the same reason.

Foolish? Some would say so. But as St. Paul said: ***the foolishness of God is wiser than men.***

Now, that doesn't give us the freedom to sin; it gives us the freedom to repent and rejoice in our Saviour. And the freedom to live the new life that He gives us, not having to constantly look back and try to make up for what we've done, but to look forward and live from His forgiveness that has already taken care of what we've done, all our sins, and to live new lives.

That's what Jesus told Peter. ***From now on you will be catching men.*** From now on, a new life.

I actually think this is an example of one of those foolish things that God likes to do. I have become convinced that Peter and his co-workers were not very good fishermen. I don't think they would have been on the Forbes 500 list of companies in Galilee at that time. The Scriptures tell us they were fishermen, but they're never catching anything! They're always failures and they don't seem to know how to navigate their boat through storms very well either. But *these are the guys* Jesus grabs hold of and uses. To be His disciples, then apostles, and these guys who aren't very good at catching fish are going to be catching men for Him. And they do. They do because their new life isn't just a new start and a second chance - *it is a whole new life.* The life of Jesus, given to them, living in them, and working through them.

And so it is with you. In Holy Baptism Jesus has come to you and dwells with you and raised you to a new life in Him. And He will use you in ways you would never imagine. Just like Peter. Maybe even in the thing you think you're not very good at!

But a warning about that: you'll be surrounded by sinners. For if Jesus came to dwell with sinners, guess where you're going to dwell when Jesus dwells in you? Yup, with sinners. So don't be surprised. Don't be surprised like Ezekiel, who cried out to God that *all there was was sinners all around him!* and so he ran away.

But God sends him back saying, in a way: **do not be afraid**. Maybe you are surrounded by sinners, but they're MY sinners, God says. The ones I've come to save. The ones I want to dwell with. The ones I want *you* to dwell with. So go back. Live your new life and don't worry about the results. I'll do that, God says. That's My job.

And you know, maybe that right there is what it's all about. That we stop trying to do God's job for Him, and stop trying to tell Him how to do His job, and just repent and rejoice in being His children. And if we do that, seems to me the rest will fall into place. Jesus came to dwell with sinners, with you and me, so that we could dwell with Him forever.

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.