

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It seems we have become a society of doubters, critics and skeptics. We have become so hardened by a lifetime of false advertising and hard sells that we rarely accept things at face value. Modern science has taught us to doubt everything until it is proven. In fact, doubt is considered normal and essential for survival. There is practically nothing left in this world which we trust wholeheartedly without reservations or suspicions or conditions. Everyone used to trust the family doctor. Now numerous news pieces make us wonder if he has continued his education, or if he has just put in a 36 hour shift. People used to trust charitable organizations, but now we hear stories about corruption and wasting of funds. People used to trust unquestioningly their pastors. Now many people are suspicious of all clergy, thinking many are child molesters or con artists. And unfortunately, doubt has even made serious inroads into Christianity. Modern biblical criticism has modern "theologians" doubting who the real Jesus really was. Perhaps you've heard of the color coded Bible these doubters have published. They use various shades of reds and grays to show you how certain you can be that the words you are reading are the actual words of Jesus. They attest that many of the words in the Bible accredited to Jesus were just made up by Jesus' devout followers.

All this doubt has obscured the fact that doubt is an extremely unsettling thing. If you doubt everything, where can you turn? The world would tell you, turn to yourself, because you're the only one you can trust. But if you're honest with yourself you'll have to admit that personal experience has taught you you can't even rely on yourself much of the time, which pretty much leaves nothing, right? Wrong! From our text this morning we discover there is something that you can trust without reservation. There is something that is guaranteed and certain and rock solid and always effective. It is CHRIST'S WORD.

The story we are looking at this morning is commonly called "the calling of the first disciples." You'll see that heading in your NIV Bibles. That might leave us with the impression that this was their first contact with Jesus. But that's not true. These "first disciples", namely Peter, James and John had already listen to Jesus teach a few times. They had already seen his miracles. In fact, Peter had even seen Jesus heal his own mother-in-law of a sickness. But these men had not for whatever reasons become Jesus' full time disciples yet. It would appear that up until this time they still had some doubts and hesitations about following Jesus with unquestioning faith. That was soon to change.

The text says that Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret (you're probably more familiar with the other name of this body of water -- the Sea of Galilee). A large crowd had gathered around him and were pressing in on him to hear him teach God's Word to them. Jesus, the ever loving and thoughtful Savior, didn't want anyone to miss out on his important words. The crowd had probably gotten so close that the people closest to him were absorbing all the sound from his voice, and he couldn't make himself heard. Jesus found a solution to the problem. There were two fishing boats nearby, one of them belonging to Simon Peter. Jesus got in Simon's boat,

and asked him to push out into the lake a little ways. Peter happily obeyed Jesus -- he was undoubtedly pleased to get a "front row" seat to hear Jesus words.

Now before we get too much further, I think it's important to note that before Jesus ever asks Peter to follow him unquestioningly, Peter had heard a good portion of God's word from Jesus himself. Friends, that's where we also turn if we are to follow Jesus unquestioningly. We don't look to our own lives and experiences for convincing proofs of God's existence. Rather, we listen to what God has to tell us in the pages of Holy Scripture. We get the story straight from the mouth of the source -- from God. After all, how can you trust someone you don't know? In the pages of Scripture we become acquainted with our Savior and get to know him personally. The story continues:

When Jesus 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."

Now I want you to think about what was going on here. Peter had been up all night fishing and hadn't caught a single thing. Any fishermen out there know how frustrating that can be. So Peter was probably tired and not in the best of moods. He had just finished cleaning the fishing nets, which I'm sure he didn't enjoy much, considering how useless those nets had been the night before. Then Jesus, who was an incredible teacher and probably not a shabby carpenter either, but certainly not an experienced fisherman, told Peter to go to the deep part of the day in broad daylight, and throw out the net for a catch! How ridiculous that must have sounded to Peter, the experienced fisherman who had probably been fishing on that body of water since knee high to Papa Zebedee. Peter's experience told him he wouldn't catch anything. His tired, aching bones told him that net wouldn't be much fun to clean yet again. But what did Peter do? Despite what his reason and experience told him... despite his skepticism, Peter obeyed Jesus, simply because it was Jesus telling him to do this. What trust and respect Peter must have had for Jesus!

And what happened? **"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."** What a huge catch this was! Imagine this fishing style. How many fish do you suppose they normally caught each time they threw out the net, which would just sink down, catching whatever happened to be swimming by? Even if a school of fish happened to be swimming by, how many fish would they get in the net? Maybe a couple dozen? Imagine how densely those fish must have been packed in that area for the net to be completely full of fish to the point of bursting. What's more, they managed to fill two boats with fish to the point that they were beginning to sink! This wasn't a typical catch, or even a rare catch. This was obviously a miracle, and the disciples knew it.

The first truth I want you to take home from this text is this: the Word of Christ is powerful and effective. When Jesus speaks -- when he promises -- there is power in those words. No matter how unlikely it seems, no matter how many reasons you can think of to the contrary, Christ does what he says. Always. Jesus tells us some things that are hard to believe... things we're skeptical about because of our reason and experience. You can't find a job? Jesus says, he will provide all you need for your body and life. Are you sick or not healthy? Jesus promises he's taking care of you and this will work out for good. Did you really screw up... a sin that's troubling you this morning? Jesus says he fully and completely forgives that sin forever. Are you troubled by the

thought of the prospect of your own death? Jesus promises you will live with him forever in heaven. In all of these, he says, "Trust me. For I do what I say." And the Jesus who crammed that net full of fish by his almighty word, fulfills every last one of these promises to you and me as well.

Now here is the important part of our text. Look at Peter's reaction to this miraculous catch of fish. "**When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"**" Did you expect that reaction? I didn't. I expected that he might run up to Jesus, giving him a hug, thanking him profusely. But fall at his feet and say, "Go away from me.. .I'm a sinner!" Why this? You see, friends, Peter had this reaction because he finally was confronted head on with the power and glory of Jesus. He came to the shocking and frightening realization that standing on his smelly fishing boat, in front of him, a smelly fisherman, was the very Son of God himself who could smell all too well that fishy smell of his sinful heart. At this point Peter certainly wasn't wondering whether or not he should follow Jesus with an unquestioning faith. Instead he becomes painfully aware of the fact that he wasn't worthy to follow Jesus at all because of his sinfulness and rebellion against God.

Friends, it is equally vital for us to see the glorious power and transcendent, holy nature of Jesus. We need to also come to the sobering realization that Jesus isn't our supernatural buddy we pal around with once in a while. He is the almighty God who created the universe, who is pure and holy and demands nothing less than perfection from us. Friends, unless we come to grips with Jesus' glorious power, we will never take his word seriously. For until we come to realize our sorry sinful state, we will always be putting just a little trust in ourselves which rightfully belongs solely to God. When we see his awesome, holy power, we are humbled, we despair of ourselves, and we fall on our knees pleading for forgiveness for our doubt and rebellion. Yes, the first step in following Jesus with unquestioning faith is first despairing of ourselves and realizing we have no right to follow him, nor expect anything but eternal death and destruction from the Righteous Judge.

Having trembled at Jesus' glorious power, what does Jesus say to Peter, and to us? "**Do not be afraid.**" What comforting words these are to people who are despairing and are trembling before the almighty God. It's when we have finally humbled ourselves before the almighty that HE reaches out to US in love. We, like Peter, wish for Jesus to depart from us, for we are sinful. But Jesus refuses to turn his back on us. Instead in love he turns his back and invites us to unload our burden of sin onto him -- that very sin that causes us to tremble before him. And so we unload it onto the back of Jesus. And then he beckons us to follow as he walks away. As we follow behind him, we see him carry that burden of sin up the hill to Golgotha. We see him nailed to a cross, still bearing our sin on himself. And we see him suffer because of that burden, and we see him die because of that burden. And at his death, to our utter joy and amazement, we see that burden of sin disappear, paid for in full by the Son of God. As we keep watching, the joy and amazement increase as we see Jesus rise from the dead and come out of the grave three days later. He lives and reigns victorious over sin! Our debt of sin has been paid for in full! The sins of the world have been paid for in full! The almighty God sweeps down out of heaven, scoops us up in his hand and hold us in a loving embrace, showering us with love and affection. We are no longer sinful in his sight! We are holy and perfect in his sight because of what Jesus did on that cross for us. We are no longer compelled to cry out "Depart from me." Instead we find everlasting comfort in Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid!"

Then look what Jesus says to Peter. He reaches out to Peter in love with a wonderful invitation and promise. "**From now on you will catch men.**" Not only is Peter's sin forgiven, but he is invited to follow Jesus and he is told he would have the privilege witnessing to others of Jesus' incredible love for mankind. Peter was called to throw out the net of the good news of Jesus and gather other people in to know the unconditional love of Christ. And oh what a fisher for men Peter would become. We know that on Pentecost alone, God used Peter and the other disciples to catch over 3,000 for the kingdom of God!

We're told that Peter, James and John pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus. We see that they followed Jesus with unquestioning faith as his powerful Word changed them forever. Friends, we have heard that same word of Christ. When you are tempted to doubt... when your faith feels weak and God feels distant, what can you do? When you are skeptical or cynical about God, will you just figure it's good, healthy doubt? I pray not. There is a much better way. Instead open your Bible, and get to know your Savior. As you get to know him better and better, you'll also get to know yourself better, and three truths will become crystal clear in your mind – three truths Peter discovered on that day on the Lake of Gennesaret. First you see clearly that God is just and holy, and you are not. That makes you tremble. But you see also that God is love. Loving enough that he didn't want to see you end up in hell. Loving enough that he gave up his one and only Son Jesus to become your substitute who would suffer God's wrath in your place. Third, you see that God has called you to an awesome privilege and responsibility... to be fishers of men. To share his powerful, life-changing word with others... to be the mouth piece of Christ! May God make us eager, confident, dedicated fishers of men to the glory of our great God and Savior. Amen.

“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” [Philippians 4:7] Amen.