

## Push and Shove: When We Condescend to Christ

**5** Once, people were crowding in around Jesus and listening to the word of God while he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. <sup>2</sup> He saw two boats moored alongshore. The fishermen had left them there and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Jesus 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.

<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 him, “Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. <sup>7</sup> They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man.” <sup>9</sup> For Peter and all those with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on you will catch people.”

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

The word “pulpit” means a platform or stage upon which a man preaches. In the days of harpooning whales in America, the raised deck in the front of a whaleboat became known as a pulpit on account of the almost universal Christianity among whalers-- they were making a joke about the position of the platform, but they were also remembering this passage of the Gospel.

Jesus used the boat as a pulpit so that he could speak to more of the crowd that had gathered at the shore of the Lake. It was a strange pulpit, but there are stranger ones in the New Testament, such as jail cells, riverbanks, dinner tables, a sinking ship in the surf at Malta, the court of Ceaser in Rome, a chariot heading back to Ethiopia, and a cross.

In between verses 3 and 4 of our text, Jesus preached a whole sermon, perhaps quite a bit longer than the one you’re listening to now. On this occasion we don’t know what he preached about. I think that this about 6 months before the Sermon on the Mount, and at this

time we have examples of Jesus focusing on repentance, and about sin and the grace of God,<sup>a</sup> and the authority of God's ministers to pronounce forgiveness in God's name.<sup>b</sup>

After Jesus finished, he spoke with Simon Peter-- it was his boat-- and told him to go out to deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Now, Peter was washing the nets. After use, fishing nets are like washcloths and bath towels; if they're not washed once in a while, they begin to get stiff and even shrink, so they needed to be washed, dried and even stretched a bit. But Jesus had other ideas.

Peter was a little condescending. To "condescend" is to talk down to someone who seems like they don't understand something important or to talk with someone who is beneath your station in life. So Peter explained that he knew his business. He was tired. He had been fishing all night. And the fish weren't biting-- any angler will tell you that there are times when nothing will tempt them.<sup>c</sup> So he "explained" this to Jesus but agreed to do it anyway. Did he think he would have an "I told you so" for the Son of God?

On the north end near Capernaum, the lake gets pretty deep pretty quick; just a few hundred yards out the bottom is more than ten fathoms or 60 feet down. And what was lacking for Peter got filled up pretty quick. No luck fishing? How about the power of God to fill your nets, Simon smarty-pants. No catch for all your hard work? How about more than you've ever caught before? Your clean, washed net all ready to go? Nope-- there's gonna be so many fish that your net's going to tear. Oh, and the nets of the next boat, too. And both your boats are going to start to sink.

And as for that condescending, "There, there, I know better, Jesus," attitude-- let's get rid of that, too. Jesus is the Son of God, the Maker of Heaven and earth. You don't think he knows where the fish are? He put them there. A sparrow doesn't fall that he doesn't he doesn't know about, and a fish doesn't flick a fin without him knowing exactly what the ripples will do.

This is what Peter realized. Sinful man (that's us) like to tell God, "I know better than you do. You're old fashion, O Lord. You're quaint, O Creator, but your creation has moved on. Or, and let's get right to it: We Christians are genuinely interested in God's holy law. But we get to a certain point in our study of the law, and we discover that our sinful nature has its own agenda. It's not, "What does the law say," but, "What are the loopholes? What can I get away with, where God might still wink at me?"

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<sup>a</sup> Mark 1:15; Mark 2:5; Luke 4:43; Luke 5:23-24

<sup>b</sup> Mark 2:10-11, 17.

<sup>c</sup> *The Two Doctors Part 1.*

So what is the catch of fish to Peter? It is a proclamation of the law, or of the gospel? It is a display of Christ's power, and therefore it is both.

As law, it condemns Peter's condescension, the "I know better than you" attitude man has toward God. For God shows that he is above all; above nature, above time, above mathematics, above history, above circumstance: There is God on his throne above all. And he is supreme. His supremacy crushes us and our sinful attitudes.

We fall to our knees in repentance; and remember that repentance has more than one part. It begins with terror, terror over our sins. As Martin Luther said, "Repentance consists mostly in your acknowledging that God is right and confessing that his judgment is true when he says that we all sinners and are condemned. When you do this from the heart, then repentance has begun."<sup>a</sup> But don't let that fear stand alone, as if God will never relent. For he has already sent his Jesus our Savior into the world to rescue us. Believe in Jesus, put all our trust in him, giving up on your own merits or works, and let Christ's work alone be what you bring before your heavenly Father for judgment. Because of Jesus, our faults, our failings, and even our guilty feelings fall away and are blown by the breath of God into nothingness. We are forgiven.

Think of what this means for us. This is liberty, more than any other liberty in our lives. To be free of the guilt of sin, for the evidence to be shredded and deleted by the judge at his bench in the courtroom is what it means to be forgiven through faith in Christ.

And now, let's bring back the sinking boats and tearing nets and the frightened Simon Peter, because the miracle preaches the gospel as well as the law. Everything lacking in our lives can be filled up by God; this is his offer to us. "Test me in this," God says to his prophet, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." That's from Malachi, just about fourteen verses from the end of the Old Testament, the Bible that Peter and his partners read.

■ Our sins and lack of obedience? Filled up by Christ! ■ All of our needs in this lifetime? Filled up by Christ! ■ Our yearning, sometimes aching desire for the reunion in the life of the world to come? Filled up by Christ!

Simon Peter responded by answering the call to follow Jesus as a disciple. Come and live a life that follows Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>a</sup> Sermons, Vol 1 (LW 51) p. 318; Sermon at the Baptism of Bernhard von Anhalt, April 2, 1540 (Matthew 3:13-17)