

“This Is Jesus: Master Fisherman”

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” ¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

Back in 1949 near Hayward, Wisconsin, Louis Spray caught a 69 pound Muskie. That is a world record! Ever since, the record has been hotly debated. The National Freshwater Fish Hall of Fame recognizes Spray’s catch as the world record while the International Game Fishing Association does not because Spray shot the fish with his revolver instead of pulling it into the boat completely with rod and reel. Some call Louis Spray the Babe Ruth of Muskie fishing. Others call him a fraud and shameless self-promoter. A Chicago mafia guy, Joey “the Doves” Aiuppa claimed that he actually caught the fish and sold it to Spray for \$50 since he was in hiding from the law and didn’t want the publicity that would come with catching the fish. Quite the fishing story! Today our Gospel lesson from Luke 5 shares with us an even better fishing story! Jesus, the hobby fisherman, gives some professional fisherman some fishing tips after the professionals had just spent a long, tiring, fruitless night fishing. **“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.’ 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”** (Luke 5:4-7). What an amazing fishing story! This is Jesus: Master Fisherman. But this story really has nothing to do with THAT kind of fishing. Jesus gets to the point with these words, **“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch people.’ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him”** (Luke 5:10-11). I’m sure Jesus can tell fishing stories with the best of them, but the fishing that Jesus is most concerned about is human beings coming to trust in Him as Lord and Savior because **“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”** (Romans 10:13) from Hell.

As the Master Fisherman Jesus could do all the fishing himself. In fact, while he lived on this earth he did plenty of fishing. Yet as the Master Fisherman, it has always been his strategic ministry plan to recruit other fisherman who learn from the master and seek encouragement from the master for their fishing trips. Now at this point we could make the distinction between Public Ministry fishing and Universal Priesthood of all Believers fishing. From the greater group of Christians God has called some into the public ministry fishing – to lead the charge and to train and encourage the other fisherman. He did that in Old Testament times through prophets and priests and continues to do that in New Testament times through his apostles, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and others. And certainly the world could use more public minister fisherman. In the last 25 years St. John's has sent on 6 of their sons and daughters into the public fishing ministry. We should all be asking the question – who are the next ones from our midst? A WELS pastor, and current District President, once made this comment at a conference I attended: **“Every Christian man and woman should wrestle with that question – has God given me the gifts to be in the public ministry? And if the answer is ‘yes,’ then strongly consider it!”** While public ministry fisherman are certainly an important part of the Master Fisherman's SMP, I would like to focus on the fact that Jesus has called every Christian into the fishing business. **“Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch people”** (Luke 5:10).

“Don't be afraid.” Fitting words because for various reasons every Christian is afraid to live a Christian life and take it deeper by having spiritual conversations with people. What if they don't listen to me? What if the words don't come out right? What if they don't want to be my friend or significant other anymore? What if things become awkward or strained after we have that spiritual conversation? What if they ask me questions I can't answer? I don't think I know the Bible well enough to go fishing? What if people accuse me of being a hypocrite because I still struggle with sin and my life hasn't always been the best example of being a believer in Christ? I kind of like my current level of Christianity. I'm not sure I really want to sacrifice more time, energy, and financial resources in sharing God's Word because I'm already busy and it will interfere with other hobbies and interests that I have. Any of those excuses sound familiar? None of us deserves to be a part of the Master Fisherman's fishing team. None of us is up for the task by ourselves. Good thing we aren't alone. The Master Fisherman goes with us first with a call. **“Don't be afraid; from now on YOU will catch people.”** Fishing for people is not optional for the Christian. If you are a Christian then you will naturally do it. Paul puts it this way. **“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved”** (Romans 10:10). Find comfort for your fears in the fact that the Master Fisherman chose you personally to be one of his fisherman. He would never ask you to do something that you aren't capable of doing with his help. And keep in mind that the Master Fisherman knows that each of us is capable of doing much more fishing than we think we are capable of doing. The Master Fisherman goes with us secondly with a promise. None of us feels adequate or worthy for the task of being one of Jesus fisherman. And to be honest, none of us is adequate or worthy. We all know full well what the prophet Isaiah felt like in the presence of the Master Fisherman.

“Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...” (Isaiah 6:5). And we all know full well what the apostle Peter felt like in the presence of the Master Fisherman. **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man”** (Luke 5:8). But listen to the promise that makes us worthy and adequate to be Jesus fisherman. Because of Jesus perfect life, and innocent sacrifice of his life on the cross **“your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for”** (Isaiah 6:7). When God looks at you he doesn’t see a hypocrite. He sees someone who is the perfect candidate to do some fishing. The Master Fisherman goes with us finally with effective equipment to do our fishing. **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ”** (Romans 10:17). Strive to represent God well with your personal hygiene and the way you dress. Strive to represent God well with your work ethic and positive smiling demeanor. Strive to represent God well with God pleasing words, actions, attitudes, and lifestyle choices. Strive to have beautiful and well maintained church/school facilities and strive to be a friendly and caring congregation. But know at the end of the day that none of those things actually brings someone from spiritual death to spiritual life through faith in Jesus. All those things though serve the purpose of giving you the opportunity to do some fishing in that person’s life. To share the Word of Christ and let God the Holy Spirit work through the powerful bait of the Word in the way that he wills.

This is Jesus: Master Fisherman. There is no doubt that Jesus could do this work much better without us. But as a gift of his love, the Master Fisherman chooses to work with us and through us to accomplish his work. And there is no doubt that the fishing that Jesus has called us to do is not always easy or comfortable. The Bible is filled with just as many stories about how people rejected the message about Jesus as Savior as there are stories about those who believed it. Sometimes being a part of the Master Fisherman’s crew will feel awesome (show picture of peaceful fishing spot). And sometimes it will feel very challenging and discouraging (show picture of fishing in dangerous choppy waters). So let’s do some fishing because as Paul reminds us, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”** (Romans 10:14-15). As Christians we have the answers to life’s biggest questions. Where did this universe come from? What is my purpose for existing? How can I be happy when there is so much evil in this world? Where am I going after this life? How can I be prepared for death and eternity? We know the answers to all of those questions. So let’s share the knowledge that was revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word – the answers to life’s big questions and the forgiveness, the hope, the peace, the confidence, the joy, the Heaven that is ours through faith in Jesus. As we do that, this is the Master Fisherman’s promise to us. **“Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame”** (Romans 10:11) in God’s presence and for eternity in Heaven where our fishing stories will never be questioned and will never grow old. Amen.