

Last Sunday night I got a phone call from one of the members of Trinity. He said, "Pastor, if you are around, turn on your television to the golf channel. Mark Wilson is leading the tournament with 4 holes to go. He is a member of our Wisconsin Synod, and is wearing a Time of Grace T-shirt. Isn't that something." Time of Grace as many of you know is a television broadcast each week, where you can hear the sermon message by Pastor Mark Jeske, a Wisconsin Synod pastor. After Mark Wilson won the tournament, he was asked by a television commentator, how he was so calm during his final round of golf. Mark said, "I went to church in the morning, and the sermon was about worry, and it really helped me." In a very dark world, Mark Wilson lets his light shine. He is making us all aware that our life on this earth is a time of grace, a time to use our gifts and abilities to the fullest, a time to serve and worship our God, and a time to draw others to the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Mark's shirt is an advertisement for Jesus Christ. Some in our society may think that Mark's biggest paycheck is the \$990,000 he made in Hawaii, but Mark himself would tell you his biggest paycheck, was not earned but given to him by his Savior, Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of his sins, and life eternal in heaven. But you know, you don't have to be a PGA professional to be a witness for Christ. Our God accepts those of us who shoot scratch golf as well as those of us who hit worm burners repeatedly. Today then, lets travel not to a golf course in Hawaii, but rather to a water hole in Galilee. Today, let's not pull out our drivers or 9 irons, but rather a fishing pole and a net. No time for golf, today, but rather, "It's Time For all of us to Go Fishing!"

When you go fishing today, you usually want to go to a place where the fish are biting. It can be quite disheartening to go out of 8 hours and not catch a thing. Jesus Christ in our story for today kind of baffles us. He goes to the land of Galilee to do some soul fishing. A place where the fish definitely weren't biting. Galilee was a land of darkness, the domain of King Herod who eventually beheaded John the Baptism, a land of demon possession, a land described by the prophet Isaiah as Galilee of the Gentiles, people living in darkness, people living in the shadow of death. Not a place where we could say the fish were biting. In fact, 700 years before Jesus visited this community, the Assyrians had conquered the terrain, carted off the people of Israel, made them slaves, and replaced the population, with Assyrians. These Assyrians were steeped in darkness and unbelief and worshiped strange gods. This was the fishing grounds that Jesus had entered.

When we hear Isaiah describe how this area was inhabited by people living in darkness and people living in the shadow of death we are reminded of other times and places in our world where the darkness is almost overwhelming. See the Indian mother walk into the waters of the Ganges River and lower her infant daughter and watch her body carried downstream, a sacrifice to guarantee that she will have more children in the future. See the man pushing a cart with a heater on it to a school in Baghdad. The heater is filled with bombs. Teachers, children and parents die horrific deaths. See the darkness all around us as material possessions and the pursuit of pleasure become more important than the Lord who gives us these blessings. Romans 1 says, "But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Like those people in Galilee, we too were in darkness. Listen to what Ephesians 2 says about us. "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." We were born into this darkness, and lived in this darkness. What frightens us about this darkness is how it can creep up on us and pull us in without even realizing what is happening. How scary that we can start feeling so comfortable in the darkness that sin no longer shocks us as

it once did. The darkness creeps up on us when we try to ignore or even cover the evil that lurks in our hearts instead of confessing it before God. Ephesians 5 says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light...Have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness."

The darkness is so great, but into this land of darkness we see a great light shining. "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." Recognize you have broken the laws of God. Recognize you have fallen short of God's expectations. Recognize that only I can save you from your sins. Recognize that in me you can clearly see the love that the heavenly Father has for you.

The greatest need people have in this life is to know that they are loved and have hope. Even your dog or cat needs to know it is loved. It has been said that you can live thirty days without food, three days without water, three minutes without air, but only three seconds without hope. To know that you are eternally loved by God and nothing can separate you from his love is the greatest blessing that can ever come into your life. That is what the kingdom of heaven is all about. That is what Jesus talked about when he preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven. He told stories about a son that was lost and came home to the open arms of a loving Father to illustrate this love. He told the people about a king, about himself, their Lord and God who had come to rescue them and open up treasures to them. The greatest treasure is the love he earned for all of us by dying on the cross to make a ransom payment for sin and deliver you from the darkness that controls your life. Romans 8 says, "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the great light that has come into your life. He wants people all over the world to enjoy this blessing and come out of the darkness. Jesus called his disciples so they would bring this light to others still in the darkness. Just as Jesus chose an unlikely place of darkness to shine forth with his glory, he chose unlikely people, fishermen from Galilee to take this light into the world. Jesus walked along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He reached into this land of darkness and called fishermen to come and follow him. "He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a nets into the lake for they were fishermen. 'Come follow me,' Jesus said. At once they left their nets and followed him." Then Jesus saw two other brothers, James and John and he called them to follow him as they were mending nets with their father. "Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."

This was not the first time these two sets of brothers heard Jesus speak to them. As we heard before, it was John the Baptist who pointed Andrew to Jesus and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Andrew spent time with Jesus, and Andrew told his brother Peter we have found the Messiah. James and John were also among those who listened to Jesus and spent time with them. Then the call came for full-time soul fishing. "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Instead of throwing out nets to capture fish they would throw out the word of God and see it bring in people. Instead of mending nets they would be mending the lives of broken people with the never failing promises of God's Word.

Our Savior went fishing for us too and caught us by his grace. Jesus considered you and me keepers. He didn't want to throw us back into the murky waters of sin and unbelief. He kept fishing for us and snagged us with his love. Jesus didn't use a cane pole or a graphite rod with Zebko reel. Jesus used a rugged plank of wood and some rusty nails for his pole and hook. And he used himself as the lure. He allowed himself to be hung on the cross for the entire world to see, so that all might witness the power of his love!

Someone took the time to share that powerful message with you. The Holy Spirit worked

in your heart, creating faith in Jesus your Savior, and you were caught! It has very little to do with you or me, and it has everything to do with the amazing grace of our Savior-God. We can learn something about this truth from the fishing technique these disciples used. When Jesus found the men in our text, they were casting a net into the Sea of Galilee. This was most likely a round net with lead weights attached to the ends. When this net was thrown into the water it would spread out in a circle and sink, capturing whatever was below.

This kind of fishing didn't require a huge tackle box full of shiny lures or a collection of rods and reels. The net was simply cast out and whatever was caught was dragged in. This is exactly what Jesus had in mind when he sent out his disciples to be fishers of men. It's exactly what he has in mind when he presents you with the same opportunity. Don't rely on yourself to share the gospel. And don't rely on other people to be ready to receive it. Think about it. How many fish really want to be caught? It's the same thing with people. By nature, we are sinful and hostile to God. We're afraid of him. We despise him. We disobey him. We fear him. There's nothing we can do to condition ourselves to be ready to be caught. We can't take any credit for our faith in Jesus any more than we can take the credit for leading someone to faith. It has little to do with how good we are, and it has everything to do with how gracious our Savior is. We are simply to throw the net of the Gospel out there, and let God work the results.

Peter, Andrew, James and John were not the greatest fishermen. They didn't have a formal education. Time and again, they proved how spiritually ignorant they were. They made a lot of mistakes. They said a lot of foolish things. Think of Peter. He was so impetuous. He was the one, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, insisted that he would rather go to the cross with Jesus rather than deny him. And just a couple of hours later, we find Peter crying in the dark because a little girl challenged his faith. And this is the one called the Rock? James and John were also arrogant and foolish. They foolishly thought they could sit at Jesus' right and left in power and authority. They had no idea of what kind of kingdom Christ was establishing. These men had a lot of misgivings concerning Christ. Yet, Jesus was gracious he sought them out to be fishers of men. And he has done the same with us.

Someone once said that God has called us to do the fishing, but he cleans and keeps them. How true that is! That underscores the beauty of our Lord's grace. The Holy Spirit has caught us with his gospel – leading us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior – Son of God and Son of Man. He's cleansed us in the waters of baptism, showering us with his redemption. God has cleansed us and he can certainly use us! And the opportunities to share the gospel with others have nothing to do with how good we are, but how gracious our Lord is.

Whenever the members of Trinity go fishing they usually take a couple of rods along with them because they don't like having to tie knots or untangle string. That way they are always ready to fish. It's necessary to have the right equipment. The Holy Spirit has placed the perfect fishing equipment in our hands. It's not a tackle box full of baits. It's the sweet message of sins forgiven in Jesus' name. The Bible reveals such a message to us. And that's all we need. Above all, we have God's promise to bless our efforts as he sees fit. All we need to do is spread our nets and share the gospel of Jesus. God will do the rest. So, let's go fishing! Amen.