

God's Favor Is For Sharing!  
Luke 5:1-11

A few weeks ago, we held an Annual Planning and Leadership Training session for our current church officers and church volunteers. The original agenda contained an exercise designed to develop a theme, a motto, or a slogan to guide our work in the coming year. Unfortunately, the schedule was so full of other things that we had to delete that particular exercise. But wouldn't it be nice if we had some slogan to rally around – something in line with our strategic plan of making disciples who love like Jesus, creating a world where God's love reigns? What about, "The Year of the Lord's Favor!" as a motto? What if this year we focused on better enjoying for ourselves, and sharing with others, the wonderful favor of God? After all, that seems to have been the guiding theme of Jesus' life and ministry.

In an earlier sermon, we saw Jesus preaching in his hometown synagogue from the words of the prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk. 4:18-19) Applying those words to himself, Jesus then said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:21) Jesus then went on to explain that God's favor is for everyone; not just the Israelites or people like them, but for outsiders also, even foreigners like the Syrians and Sidonians, people with a history of attacking and oppressing the people of Israel. (Lk. 4:22-27)

Well the Nazoreans didn't like the thought of that one little bit, so they hustled Jesus out of the synagogue, up a nearby hill, and to the edge of a steep cliff where they tried to cast him down! But Jesus slipped through their midst and went on his way, casting favor left and right on everyone he met.

You see, God's favor is for sharing! It's just too good to keep to oneself! So, upon leaving Nazareth, Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum and healed a man with an unclean spirit (Lk. 4:31-37) Then he went to Simon Peter's house and healed Peter's mother-in-law of a terrible fever. (Lk. 4:38-39) Then Jesus healed the sick and the demon possessed – any and all who were brought to him with any kind of ailment. Finally, Luke chapter 4 closes with Jesus telling the crowds, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to...other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.' So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea." (Lk. 4:43-44)

Yes, God's favor is for sharing! It's just too good to keep to oneself! That's why we see Jesus by the seaside preaching to a crowd in our reading for today. He just couldn't help himself. He had the good news of God's favor and it had to be shared!

And the fact that he was sharing it by the seaside is significant, I believe. You see, he began his ministry in the synagogues but he didn't keep it there. He preached in the synagogues then went to the seaside. He preached in the sanctuary then went to the seashore. He preached to the congregation then went to the crowds. He preached to the fellowship then went to the fields. And in doing this, he seems to have set a model

for us to follow in our day. We come to this place but must return to our space to share the good news of God's favor with everyone, everywhere, even as we go!

As Methodists, we should be quite at home with this model of ministry. This was, in fact, the way Methodism spread in the days of John Wesley our founder. He started preaching in the churches and in small group meetings and then got an invitation from his friend, the Reverend George Whitefield, inviting him to preach in the fields outside of Bristol. On March 29, 1739, John Wesley described the scene in his Journal. Wesley wrote: "In the evening I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in church."<sup>1</sup>

And then, on April 2<sup>nd</sup> he added this about his first foray into field preaching: "At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people." And what was his text? "The Scripture on which I spoke was this," he wrote. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Sound familiar?

From that time forward, John Wesley shared God's favor in churches, societies, small groups, and fields! In and out, out and in, that was the pattern of his ministry. And that was the reason for the rapid growth of Methodism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as well. We saw a similar pattern here in America where circuit riding preachers carried the message of God's favor far and wide, and not just to churches and chapels. That was Jesus' way. That was Wesley's way. That was the circuit riders' way. And that should be our way, today!

In fact, this pattern led me to leave parish ministry after 12 years of service in the church to pursue military chaplaincy where I could share God's favor not only in churches and chapels, but also with civilians in office spaces, with sailors aboard ships, and with Marines out in the fields. Yes, good news is for sharing...with everyone...everywhere!

Now back to our lesson. We not only see Jesus sharing God's favor with a crowd by the seaside but we also see him sharing God's favor with Peter in Peter's boat! Do you remember how the story goes? Luke says, "Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon (Peter), and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. by Percy Livingston Parker, Moody Press, Chicago, pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So, they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”...Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid.’” (Lk. 5:1-8, 10)

In this incident, Jesus did two things to shower Peter with God’s abundant favor. First, he filled his seine, then he forgave his sin! A seine is a net. Peter, James, and John had fished all night and hadn’t caught a thing. As fishermen, their livelihood depended on their catch. You see, by filling his seine, Jesus provided for Peter’s physical needs.

And our Lord wants to shower us with his favor by providing for our physical needs as well. That’s why in his inaugural sermon at Nazareth – a sermon about the year of God’s favor – Jesus said his ministry was all about sharing good news with the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering the sight of the blind, and letting the oppressed go free. There may have been a spiritual component to each of those actions but we do them an injustice by simply spiritualizing them as if there were no physical facts involved. And so, when we read the gospels, we see Jesus doing precisely the things described. He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He helped the poor. He advocated for the oppressed. And he cared for people’s physical needs. So yesterday, following that example, about ten of us went down to the Marian House Soup Kitchen and filled the seines of nearly 700 people by serving lunch to God’s children in need. That what Jesus did; and that’s what we should do, too.

Yes, Jesus filled Peter’s seine, and then forgave Peter’s sin. You see, when Peter saw that miraculous catch of fish, he sensed that he was somehow in the presence of someone who was more than just a mere mortal – someone who either represented or embodied the very God of Israel – someone who was, at the very least, a holy messenger from God. Standing in the presence of that holiness, Peter was reminded of his own waywardness. So, Peter fell at Jesus’ feet and said, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Lk. 4:8) And Jesus responded to Peter by saying, “Do not be afraid.” (Lk. 4:9) You see, Jesus knew Peter’s sin better than Peter knew it himself. Nevertheless, Jesus forgave Peter, embraced him, and showered him with God’s loving favor nonetheless! By forgiving his sin, Jesus provided for Peter’s spiritual needs.

And our Lord wants to shower us with his favor by providing for our spiritual needs, too – whatever those needs might be. He wants to fill our boats with spiritual blessing. And if we know him then he already has! In the words of the apostle Paul, “...the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (Ep. 1:3) Wow! I’m not sure I know what all is encompassed by that phrase, but surely it points to the fact that our Lord wants to shower us with every conceivable spiritual blessing – the forgiveness of sin, power for living, the fruit of the Spirit, and so much more!

Yes, the Lord wants to shower us with every imaginable spiritual blessing. And not only us, but others, also! That's why Jesus immediately called Peter, James, and John, to join him in the work of sharing God's favor with others. That's why Jesus said to Peter, with James and John standing by, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him." (Lk. 4:10-11)

You see, Jesus had been about the business of showering people with God's loving favor ever since he first preached that sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. But the work was too large for one man alone. He needed partners in the enterprise. And so, Peter, James, and John were among the first to follow him in this business of sharing God's favor.

So how does this apply to you and me? Well today we hear in this reading the call of Christ to us – Christ calling us to join him in sharing God's favor with everyone, everywhere, and that, all the time. And we don't have to be anyone special to do this. Peter, James, and John were just ordinary fishermen, more ordinary than you and I are, I suspect. But they followed Jesus in this business of scattering God's favor far and wide, and God blessed their efforts. The fact that we're in church today is a testimony to their success so long ago.

So, what specifically are we called to do? Well, I think we're called to come here and then go there, filling seines and forgiving sins. We're called to come here to our church, inviting others – our friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors – to join us. And we're called to go out into to our world – our world of work and labor, clubs and leisure, friends and family – meeting physical and spiritual needs as best we can. We're called to show everyone, everywhere just how good God is by helping the poor, the captives, the sick, and the oppressed, just as Jesus did. And we're called to tell everyone, everywhere just how good God has been to us – how he's filled our seines, forgiven our sins, and favored us in so many other ways.

That just might be the sum of it. Nothing more; nothing less; and nothing hard or pushy. Just doing good, sharing good, showering the world with favor until our friends and neighbors begin to see the favor of God through us. Maybe, just maybe, this is the year of the Lord's favor at Mountain View, after all! Amen.