

The events described in today's gospel reading make me smile because I feel like I know exactly what Simon is thinking in this moment. I have had days like this fishing with my father in northern Alberta. Days where we've been out for hours, and there's just nothing. And we tried everything, going slower, going faster, going so shallow we can see bottom, and then heading back to deeper waters hoping that will change something. Changing lures, putting on fresh bait, saying prayers. And after trying everything, thinking logically, thinking illogically, trying the spiritual, resorting to the downright ridiculous, you finally must call it a day. 6 hours of nothing, I'm done. We quit and go to shore and see someone unpacking what looks like a world record catch of fish, from the same part of the same lake we failed at. He looks at us and says, “Did you try over there?” Of course we did, several times.

So, in our Gospel today, here's Simon. He's an actual expert fisherman, a guy who's been doing this since he was strong enough to pull in a net, and he and his fishing partners, who own a successful fishing business, who literally do this for a living, have been out all night and caught nothing. “Master, we've toiled all night and caught nothing.” The experts say there's no fish over there.

The experts say. How many times has that phrase been repeated over the last couple of decades? Experts tell us that Christianity is dying in North America. That it's wrong for us to try and introduce other people to Christianity. That it's wrong to talk to our neighbours about religion. And sometimes it seems correct, no matter how much we try, nobody new seems to come to church. Nobody comes seeking Christ. Our church seems to shrink month over month.

Jesus says, put out into deeper water and let down your nets. The experts say “Lord we have toiled all night and caught nothing. But at your

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word, I will let down the nets.” Though the experts say different, because you say so I will.” And they catch so many fish they almost sink two boats.

And then after that Jesus says to them “Come follow me.” Experts say that’s a bad idea. They are sitting there with two boats so full of fish that the boats are sinking. This fish could mean enough money to feed them for the next six months. This is their livelihood. This is how they make money. They have multiple boats and employees and an above-average income. Experts say leaving that behind is a bad idea. But read the text; they left everything and followed him. If you keep reading, right after this passage they come across a leper. Experts say, stay away; it’s not safe. In fact, it’s illegal to touch a leper, and if you did, there’s a mandatory quarantine and a ritual of purification. Experts say Jesus puts his disciples in harm’s way.

You keep reading in your Bible, and you will find that experts say that Jesus is not the Messiah. John Chapter 7: the Pharisees send men to arrest Jesus, and they come back empty-handed, saying We couldn’t arrest him; we’ve never heard anyone speak like him and the Pharisees look at them and say, “Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? No.” 100% of experts agree Jesus is not the Messiah. We can’t even get 100% of experts to agree on toothpaste. I’m brushing my teeth with stuff that only 4 out of 5 dentists approve. But here you have it: all the experts agree Jesus is not the Messiah.

So eventually those experts caught up to him; eventually they did arrest him, and then they beat him, mocked him, nailed him to a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem for all to see so that every single person might know this one truth that all of the experts agreed on: that following Jesus is bad for your health.

The experts were right; only one of those faithful disciples lived to old age. The rest died proclaiming Jesus as saviour after the experts told them not to. And it isn’t even surprising, after all Jesus did say following him would be bad for your health. Luke 14 tells us that we follow him at our own risk; following him involves taking up our cross, risking our own lives, and we had better sit down and count the cost before going after him. It’s a dangerous thing.

And my friends, I say all of this today because I want you to know that today our Saviour calls his disciples to follow him, and he does not call them to a life of safety. He does not call them to live a life where safety is a priority. They went without food, without water; they almost drowned in the lake; they were nearly punching bags for demons; they constantly met people infected with diseases; they were mocked; they were beaten; they were eventually killed. Experts say this was a dangerous way to live.

And right here today I tell you Jesus calls us to be fishers of men; he calls us to catch people; he calls us to follow him, and you need to know, the experts say this is a bad idea. There are actual dangers in this world right now. You might try to share the gospel with someone who hates Christianity.

Maybe today we should look at this text and look at our world and realize that following Jesus does not mean safety; it means salvation. I’m not saying we should be foolish; I’m not saying we should run into traffic yelling “I trust Jesus,” and I’m not saying we should knowingly put ourselves or others in danger. I am saying that life itself is a risk; I am saying that the experts agree that 100% of people who breathe oxygen die; I am saying that there is no way to be safe, but there is one way to be saved.

And that’s why these disciples follow him. They don’t seek a safe life; they seek one who will save their lives. This one who can make fish appear

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from nowhere will feed them. Not with perishable food but with bread from heaven that endures to eternal life. This one who commands wind and waves will protect them from danger. This one who drives out demons will protect them from evil. This one who raises Lazarus, this one who comes back from death itself, will give life to their mortal bodies. Even though they die, yet shall they live. And every one of them lived what we can only call a life that was unsafe, and at the end of all things we will see every one of them because though Jesus is not safe, Jesus absolutely saves.

And so today you and I, my friends, follow Jesus. Down a path that reaches out to our neighbours, down a path that will bring us into contact with the sick, the sinner, and yes, even death itself. And all the while we will know, we will be assured, that sickness will not be our end, sin will not be our master, and death will not be our destination. We are here today my friends, and the experts all say it is not safe, but Jesus says we are saved. Let us follow him. Amen.