

Mrs. Baker wanted to go ice fishing. She had read several books on the subject, and finally, after getting all the necessary equipment together, she made her way out onto the ice. After positioning her comfy stool, she started to make a circular cut in the ice. Frighteningly, from up above, a voice boomed, 'There are no fish under the ice.'

Startled, Mrs. Baker moved farther down the ice, poured herself a large coffee, and began to cut yet another hole. Again, from the heavens, the voice bellowed, 'There are no fish under the ice.' Mrs. Baker, now became very concerned so she moved way down to the opposite end of the ice, set up her stool, and began again to cut her ice-hole.

The voice rang out once more, 'There are no fish under the ice.' Mrs. Baker, stopped, looked upwards and said, 'Is that you, Lord?' The voice replied, 'No, this is the Ice-Rink Manager.'

Grace and peace are yours dear friends from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Research reveals this story was recorded either in Canada or Minnesota where ice fishing is both sport and a way of life for several months each year. My friends, it sometimes takes a story, joke, or example like the experiences of Mrs. Baker to help us see, hear, and understanding what God is saying to us today in the year of our Lord, 2019.

Today's gospel text is [again] one of the most familiar narrative in all of Holy Scripture; the statement from Jesus to make His disciples, 'Fishers of People'. It is an important point (in the teaching and rearing of the disciples) as Jesus prepares them for the work ahead in the Kingdom. How do we hear this message 'for the first time' and in 'new light and life' for today; here and now?

God is making the world around us new each day and with it, the Word of God also reveals the newness of life with words that will never pass away. Isaiah is given the words to prophecy *to the people* that they will become numb to all that God has done and is doing. They will participate but not experience; they will look but not see; they will listen but not hear; they will indeed become oblivious to the presence of Almighty God in their midst. They will become blind to God's providence; deaf to God's Word; disengaged with God's will.

The same threat exists in the world today my friends. People may hear the gospel narratives and remember the story, but then continue in a daily routine that simply moves us to repeat the same processes in a new location. Israel was not the only people that Isaiah was speaking to; God is speaking to the world today as well and warning us about becoming comfortable and complacent.

The gospel text in the context of Epiphany – the Light of Christ revealed to the world – shows us there is more to see, hear, and experience here than meets the eye. The first element we encounter in the gospel text is 'obedience'. Simon tells Jesus they have been fishing all night and have caught nothing. And still, Simon follows the Lord's command, not in faith (yet), but through respect and obedience.

Peter, however; is different. Peter sees, hears, and experiences the Word of God. Peter understands what has happened and understands that he is in the presence of his Lord. Immediately, Peter has the full knowledge and understanding of 'his' sins and he collapses to his knees. Peter tells Jesus to 'go away from me', to which our Lord replies, "Do not be afraid"

Sin is no longer going to separate us from the love of God, period! You have been forgiven, renewed, and strengthened for service. God is watching, listening, and participating in our lives for the sake of the multitudes of people that will come to know His love when we engage in ‘fishing for people’.

God has chosen you and me; us! God had directed us to go into the deeper waters and let the nets down. In other words; our Lord has called us all to go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, you have heard this too before. However, my friends, do we know where to go? Are we looking for fish on an ice-rink or the waters that are teeming with abundance? You see, we cannot simply take the words of Holy Scripture and follow out of mere obedience; we must also follow in faith with the full understanding, knowledge, and confidence that when we cast our nets; when we share the gospel, then the Word will be received, heard, and experienced.

What is key my friends is what Paul tells the Corinthians; the work that we perform is not to our credit (regardless of the effort, time, and extent); the work we perform is the grace of God and the Holy Spirit fulfilling the Word of God that is bringing to fulfillment the very will and design of our Almighty God: Father Son, and Holy Spirit.

Do not be afraid! Your Lord is here with you and invites you to participate. We have every promise that we will be cared for, loved, and provided for. We have heard that we each have a unique role and together we are the Body of Christ. Another promise we have is that the work we are called to perform is not difficult, laborious, or burdensome. Our Lord tells us; Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take **my yoke** upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For **my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**"

If we are fishing in the wrong place, a location of our choosing, then the effort and the results are going to take a toll on us. We will become burdened, weary, and laden with the weight of the entire world. And still, when this too becomes unbearable, our Lord will re-extend the invitation to ‘take his yoke and lighten our burdens.’ Obedience leads to an understanding of our faith my friends and trust in the Word of God leads to experiences with our Lord that will find new life, renewal, and restoration each day.

The world is full of people that are, unfortunately, fishing at the wrong direction and in the incorrect locations. The result they get leaves them without the ‘abundant life’ that God richly promised. And still, these are the very people that God calls us to find; to *catch and release* back into the world with the Word of God as their guide, strength, and stay. Each time one more person understand, see, hears, and experiences the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, there is one more human life working in the Kingdom who glorifies our Father in heaven.

We listen today and hear the Word of God; our Lord telling us where to go and whom to meet. We see the Spirit working in the world for the advancement of the kingdom; and we experience the ever-newness of life that provides us with the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen