

Go away! At some point in your life, you have probably said this to someone. Go away! Your brother is poking you; your sister is talking constantly while you try to enjoy time with your friends; annoyed and frustrated, you tell them to get lost. Or maybe it's been a bad day at work or at school; you come home irritated and just want to be left alone. Deflecting your feelings, you tell your spouse or kids to just go away and leave you alone. Or, perhaps you want others to leave because you feel ashamed. You've done wrong; you know it. You've been caught and exposed; you want only to shrink to nothing and disappear; you tell everyone to go away and leave you alone, lest they see you standing red-faced and ashamed.

Perhaps that is as close as we can get to Peter in the sermon text. He too says, Go away! Maybe there is some shame there; more likely, it is fear that has seized Peter's heart. Peter speaks to Jesus and says: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Peter asks Jesus to leave; now that is a remarkable prayer. Why would Peter want Jesus gone? Why ask Him to leave, especially since Peter was literally drowning in all the blessings that Jesus had just given to him?

Consider what led up to Peter's prayer. All night, Peter had labored and worked at his nets and in his boat; but he had caught nothing. He was skunked; he and his fishing partners had caught nothing. Professionals though they were, that night they could not catch any fish. The following day, while they are on shore washing their nets, Jesus came. Great crowds follow Jesus; they press in on Him to hear His teaching. Jesus, to better teach the crowds, steps into Peter's boat and asks Peter to take Him out a bit. There, in that fishing boat of Peter's, Jesus taught the crowds. Peter heard the teaching of this man—the Word that astonished and amazed

so many others in Galilee. Here was a new teaching—with authority! Who was this man, to teach with such power and might?

The teaching over, Jesus tells Simon: Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. Strange advice; what does this new teacher know about fishing? For Galilean fishermen, this was all wrong. Fishing was done at night in the shallow water; Jesus tells Peter to do just the opposite. Perhaps Peter found this strange advice; perhaps his fishing instinct told him this was wrong. His words express some misgivings: Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But there is something greater there than Peter's doubts; there is the word of Jesus and faith that clings to that Word. Peter continues: At your word, I will let down the nets. At your word: Here is faith in action. Here is man hearing the word of Jesus and putting it into practice. Here is Peter pushing aside misgivings and following the word of Jesus.

And this word of Jesus is trustworthy and sure; it does what it says. Peter hears this Word and follows it; he puts down the nets for a catch. Jesus sends His blessing then to Peter: the nets are filled to the breaking point. So heavy is the catch that Peter cannot haul it in himself. He calls for backup and help. When his partners arrive in a second boat, it is all they can do to haul in the great catch of fish. So great is the catch that it nearly sinks not one, but two boats.

There, in that boat sinking from the great catch of fish; there, over the deep part of the sea, Peter falls down at Jesus' knees and says: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. It is then that Peter asks Jesus to go away and leave him alone. Why ask Jesus to leave? Peter's words tell us why. Astonished at the catch of fish, Peter addresses Jesus not as master, but as Lord. He knows that this teacher, this Jesus, is no ordinary man. Proof of that is flopping in the boat all around him! Here is the Lord Himself, sitting in the boat with Peter. And who is Peter, to be seated next to the Lord? Peter is a sinful man—and no sinner can abide in the presence of

the almighty, holy Creator of heaven and earth. Peter stands in fear—trapped by the guilt of his sin; unworthy to stand before his Lord. And so he prays: Depart from me, O Lord.

Isaiah knew the same feeling. He too had stood before the Lord. Isaiah saw not a miraculous catch of fish, but rather the Lord in His temple. And, as we heard in the Old Testament, this was too much for Isaiah. “Woe is me!” he declares. “For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Isaiah stands exposed; his sin so painfully evident in the holiness of the Lord revealed to him.

For both men, for Isaiah and for Peter, God does not leave them trembling in fear and guilt. God instead brings comfort and peace. For Isaiah, comfort comes from the altar. An angel picks up a burning coal from the altar and touches it to Isaiah’s lips. A beautiful picture of atonement and redemption. The angel says: Look, this coal has touched your lips, which are indeed unclean. Your guilt is taken away; your sin atoned for. Atonement—the covering of sin; the removal of its guilt through sacrifice—comes from the altar; it flows from the altar where Christ was sacrificed to cover the sins of His people. His guilt taken away; his sin atoned for, Isaiah stands before the Lord, forgiven!

Peter’s comfort comes from the words of Jesus. “Do not be afraid!” Jesus tells Peter. Like Isaiah, Jesus’ forgiveness covered the sin of Peter. His guilt removed; his sin atoned for, Peter also is made fit to stand before the Lord without fear.

Both men are raised up for service in God’s kingdom. Isaiah is sent to Israel, to proclaim the Word of God to them. Peter will be a fisher of men. From now on, Jesus tells him, you will be catching men, not fish. Peter would “catch” men by proclaiming Jesus’ Gospel to them. This Gospel would act like a net to gather God’s people into His kingdom; to bring men into His

church. This Gospel would call men to faith and so draw them out of the unbelieving world; it would pull them into the safety of the church, just as a fisherman draws fish out of the water into his boat.

As for Peter; as for Isaiah, so also for you. The Lord works the same way in your life. His Law drives you to your knees. His law reveals our sin and our guilt, just as Peter and Isaiah saw their unclean lips and their sin. We are just as guilty as they were; our lips are unclean; we too are sinful. On our own merit, like them, we have much to fear from the Lord! We too have broken His law; we cannot stand before Him on our own. His wrath is justly turned against our sins. When our pride and posturing is stripped away, we also must confess: Woe is me! I cannot abide in the presence of the holy God, for I am sinful; my lips are unclean.

All this is preparation. This is only the first word of God to us. All this is to drive us to our knees that we might plead for God's mercy and forgiveness. God's greater word is to follow. He does not leave us trembling in our sins and guilt. His greater Word speaks forgiveness to us. God declares to you: Your guilt is taken away; your sin is atoned for. From the altar of the cross God touches your lips with the body and blood of Christ. This covers your sin; this atones for your guilt. God declares to you: Do not be afraid; I have redeemed you; I have washed away your sin. In Christ you are worthy to stand before me. Your merits amount to nothing, but Christ's merit counts for everything! By His work you are forgiven and holy; By His death you are atoned and redeemed.

As forgiven sinners, God now sends us out for service in His Kingdom. God's call to us is not as dramatic as Isaiah's or Peter's. Who among us has seen the Lord filling His temple; who among us has sat in a boat with Jesus and been overwhelmed by His miracles? But we are called to service just the same. We are called first to hear the Word of the Lord; called to follow

Jesus by listening to His voice. And what a calling this is! His Word brings great blessings to us. His Word grants us life to the full, here and eternally. His Word makes us His children and sends us out into the world as His hands and feet and mouth.

He sends us, forgiven sinners, out into our various callings. He sends us out as parents and children, husbands and wives, to care for our families; to love and serve each other. He sends us out to many and varied jobs, that through this work man's needs may be provided. Through these callings, God provides food and shelter and all of man's daily needs. Here is comfort for us in our vocations: God has called us to these and made us fit to serve within them. God has called us to serve faithfully within them; may we hear that Word and put it into practice in our lives!

All of us, as Christians, are called to respond in thanks and praise to God; called to serve as royal priests by bringing our praise to the Lord. We are called to declare the praises of God to the world around us. This Lord has brought us from darkness to light; from sin to holiness, from death to life. Speak His praise to those around you; tell them by word and deed of your Savior. By that Word God still catches men; by that Word God still brings people into His church. By that Word God draws man from the world of sin and unbelief to the glorious light of His church. Speak that Word with confidence to console the downhearted, to offer peace and hope to those otherwise lost and adrift in this world.

As for Peter, as for Isaiah, so also for you. God has shown you the depths of your sin, that He might raise you up from those depths. He has revealed to you His greater word of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. He has atoned for your sin; He has sent you into His world to serve in His Kingdom. God keep us all within His Kingdom, forgiven and redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus! Amen.