

Imagine it's the middle of the night. You've woken up and realized that you need to use the bathroom, or maybe you just want a drink of water. You get out of bed and have a choice: turn on the light, or find your way in the dark.

If you're anything like me, you choose the second option. I avoid turning on the light at all costs. Flipping the switch is harsh and hurts your eyes, and it might make it harder to go back to sleep later. It's easier to leave the light off...until, of course, you stub your toe on a table leg, or knock your hip into a doorknob.

This happens to me all the time! And yet, I still choose, time and again, to keep the lights off and stay in the shadow of night.

Because while the night might be a little dangerous, especially for our toes or hips, it can also be somewhat comforting. The light, after all, forces us to see things we might prefer to leave hidden: our dishes in the sink which we didn't get to after dinner, the running shoes by the door that we *swear* we will lace up in the morning before work—really, this time, we will!—or maybe it's the stack of mail on the counter, with a bill on top, reminding us of all the obligations, financial or otherwise, we need to attend to. It's far easier for our peace of mind to keep these things out of sight.

But still, even though we can hide from these things when they are shrouded in shadow, we can't change or address them. We can't do the dishes in the without being able to see. We can't run with no light to guide our way. We can't take care of our bills or other tasks when we can't tell what is in front of us our way. We can pretend that they're not there, but that's about it. We *need* sunlight or artificial light to make progress, we *need* some kind of light to move forward in our lives.

In this morning's reading, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah. He proclaims that “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined.” Jesus, the light of the world, has come, and everything changes.

Everything changes, because after Jesus says this, he calls his first disciples.

I love call stories, especially those recorded in the Bible. I find that, inevitably, these stories give us incredible insight into how God relates with humanity, both then, and now.

Jesus calls his first disciples by saying that they will be fishers of people.

Fishers of people—people who, as we heard, lived in a land where death cast its shadow.

Ancient fishermen would toss their nets into the water. After a period of time, they would draw the nets in. They would pull the fish through the sea and up onto the boat. From the

depths of the water into the open air. From shadow and murkiness under the surface, to the light of the sunlit deck.

The fish are gathered together...they are caught up in the net and transported.

But we're not talking about fish here...we're talking about people. And people aren't caught up in the net and transported—but maybe they're caught up in the *Word* and transformed.

How were the disciples meant to be fishers of people? How are *we* meant to be fishers of people? What does this look like?

I think it comes down to what we do as “fishers.” As fishers, as disciples, we are only acting because God has first acted in us. We are empowered and sent by God to share the good news, to share the Gospel with others. We have been freed, loved and forgiven and, in turn, have the great privilege of proclaiming freedom, love and forgiveness to others. The “net,” then, that we're given to use is one of the Word of God.

I'm always a little wary of using the fisher's “net” in an analogy, because I never want it to sound like we're “tricking” or “trapping” people into faith. It's certainly something to be cautious about. But I think we can work with it here.

If we relate the net to the Gospel, to the Word of God, we can see that this is not something that tricks or traps, but rather invites. The Word of God invites people into living deeper lives of faith, discipleship and grace. And so the Word of God is cast out into the sea of our world. God's Word comes in and among people and people are “caught up” by God and God's Word.

God, through the imperfect hands of us fishers, reaches down into the depths of despair and shadowy murkiness and pulls all people into the light of Christ.

The light of Christ! The question is, are we ready for it? Are we ready for that light?

Remember back to where we started here...that discussion of night and light. The gloom of night is difficult, a little scary and even sometimes painful...but oftentimes it feels safer. We're sometimes afraid of the light.

Or, to put it another way, we become familiar with what we can't see, even if it's hurting us, which means we're sometimes afraid of the light of Christ—we're sometimes afraid of what God might actually do in our life.

While we're in the shadows, we might be able to ignore some harsh facts of our lives. We might be able to pretend the certain relationships have become broken. We might delude ourselves by thinking our actions toward others have no bearing on our faith life. We might even be able to imagine that our salvation is in our own hands.

Lucky for us, God doesn't wait until we're ready to leave the gloom, much like fishers don't wait until fish hop up onto their boat, ready to be taken ashore.

God, the Word of God, comes down into our depths, to the places where we'd often like to hide, and gathers us in. We are caught up in the net of the Gospel and grace and pulled into the light.

This light might hurt at first. It might be too bright or too harsh. But, in the end, it is this light that allows us to heal those things that were hurting us while we were down below.

When our lives are filled with the light of Christ, we find the strength to work towards reconciliation with the people who have hurt us...or maybe who *we* have hurt. That light inspires us and sustains us in service to our neighbors, those we know and those we think of as "other."

That wonderful light finds us and gives us immeasurable grace and salvation when we are exasperated at our own feeble attempts at either—after all, grace and salvation can only come through God.

This light does not come from us, it comes from Christ. The light shines in the shadowiness of our sinful, broken lives and it is not overcome.

God has a large net, one that does not exclude or discriminate. God's Word is cast out to all people and we are caught up in it. We are caught up and saved. We are caught up and *transformed*.

We are caught up in God's loving embrace and taken into the Light.

Amen.