

O say, can you hear?
Luke 5:1-11

I'm so glad to be standing in front of you this morning as a reporter of the Good News. And also, I am honored to be your pastor.

I am a first generation Korean American. I have lived in the United States for twenty nine years, mostly in Denver. I was an ordained minister in the Korean Methodist Church when I came to the US in 1979. I studied theology for three years at Iliff School of Theology, and completed my Master of Divinity in 1984. I spent another four years studying for my Doctoral degree at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C., completing my degree in 1999. But I'm still not 100 percent comfortable speaking in English. Please understand that Korean is my mother language, and English is my second language.

Some days ago, I saw an interesting cartoon. A dog with a wrinkled, angry face approaches a cat resting in the shade. When the cat realizes that the dog is about to attack, she has the guts to confront the dog. Instead of saying "Meow", the cat growls, "Ruff, Ruff!" The dog, confused, backs away and leaves. Then the cat says to herself, "I knew being bilingual would pay off one day".

Please, be patient if it is difficult to understand me with my unusual accent.

This Sunday, we commemorate the 4th of July holiday, Independence Day. In the last two hundred fifty years, 38 countries have declared their independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain. The United States is one of them. The United States became independent from British rule in 1776. Korea, where I grew up, gained independence from Japanese after 36 years ruling in 1945. All teenagers dream and hope to be independent from their parents someday. They long for liberty and freedom from their parents, teachers, and guardians. We are the children of God, and as our teens need us, we depend on God's guidance.

Today we celebrate the spirit of American liberty and freedom, which God offers us. Every 4th of July, we hear the national anthem, usually sung by a famous singer on stage. Our national anthem begins with the simple question, "O Say, Can You See?" Remembering this image, today, I would like to ask you a slightly different question, "O Say, Can You Hear?"

Independence was an important issue until the recent century. But now-a-days, in the global world, "inter-dependence" is another pivotal issue. International relations are very important matters in both the political and economic world. We need to keep our country safe as well as wealthy. But we need to consider other countries as well. That is the Christian view. We boast of a powerful America, but also one nation under God.

Let's talk about the life God wants for us in this world. The Kingdom of God is our ultimate concern. Many prophets thought and spoke about the will of God in the world. In the days of the Old Testament, there were two kinds of prophets: seers and hearers. A seer is prophet who sees and finds God's will offered to us. Jeremiah sees God's message through a vision of pottery. A hearer is a prophet who hears God's word. Isaiah hears his message directly from the word of God. A seer like Jeremiah is artistic and visual, while a hearer like Isaiah is musical and verbal.

Today's Gospel reading from Luke 5:1-11 deals with life issues. There are questions about life; how to survive in life, how to succeed in life, and how to live a significant life. Luke gives us a story about Peter. One time, Peter and his friends had been out fishing all night, but they had caught nothing. Peter was a professional fisherman. He had worked all night, as his income depended on a good catch. He was frustrated in his work. His survival depended on his catch.

The next day, the fisherman were washing their nets on the seashore, feeling very tired and discouraged. At that moment Jesus came along and said, "Peter, I'd like to use your boat as a platform for a speech." So Peter let Jesus into his boat, and they launched out a little way from the shore. There Jesus could speak from the boat to the crowd standing on the shore.

After finishing his message, Jesus said to the fisherman, "Now let's go fishing. Launch out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Peter replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I'll let down the nets. When the disciples obeyed, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. This incident teaches us that Jesus' appearance can change our life circumstances. Peter let Jesus into his boat and Peter experienced the miracle of life.

Peter's story could be a story about success. What if he asked Jesus to work with him to build up a successful business? There are actually three differences between the two expeditions, and these differences give us principles to follow when our best attempts end in failure. I believe any person who applies these principles will be a genuine success in life.

But the Gospel's message is focused on a different type of success in life. Many people are success-oriented, but Jesus' and God's purpose is not our material success only. Beyond the life of success, there must be the significant life of God's intent.

To return to the Gospel: When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord: I am a sinful man!" For he and his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." To be a fisher of men is the significant change for the Peter. So Peter pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus.

Don't worry when you are struggling to survive. Don't be frustrated when you feel like a failure. Don't be afraid when your circumstances suddenly change. Achieving material success does not determine if your life is a success or a failure. Be prepared to hear God's call for you to lead a significant life.

I remember this story about a minister who resigned one day. He was feeling so frustrated, depressed and stressed, that one day he quit. Before he quit being a pastor, he didn't know how hard it was to find a job. He had never looked for a job before, and he didn't have any job skills, except for knowledge about the Bible and how to care for people.

After a lot of looking, he was finally hired by a zoo. The zoo was a popular place for kids, and the gorilla was the kids' favorite animal. But the beloved gorilla had recently died, and the zoo kept this top secret. The manager was looking for a replacement gorilla, but it was very hard to find one. The manager then came up with an idea: what if a man played the role of a gorilla in a gorilla costume?

The out-of-work minister was hired as this fake gorilla. It was an easy job. No stress, no depression, and no frustration. He could sleep whenever he wanted, eat whenever he felt hungry, and play when he wanted to play. He would just walk around, imitate visitors, and climb on the branches. And the benefits were better than a minister's salary and benefits.

One day the fake gorilla was showing off for the kids. He grabbed the branches and climbed up too high. As he swung from the branch, he lost his grip, flew up over the fence, and landed near a sleeping lion. He fainted, and when he woke up he saw the lion standing in front of him. And the lion said to the man... Can you guess? The lion said, "Hey buddy! Be careful! I am also a minister!"

Please repeat after me; "I'm also a minister!" You are also called to be a minister! I'm a minister! You are a minister! We are all ministers! Can you hear what the Lord is saying to you today?

O say, can you hear! Three words from the Lord: "Let me use your boat." "Launch out in deep water." And "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."