TRUST CHRIST'S WORD:

It seems we have become a society of doubters, critics and skeptics. We have become so hardened by false advertising and hard sells that we rarely accept things at face value. Modern science has taught us to doubt everything until it is proven. In fact, doubt is considered normal and essential for survival. There is practically nothing left in this world which we trust wholeheartedly without reservations or suspicions or conditions.

Everyone used to trust the family doctor. Now numerous news pieces make us wonder if he has continued his education or if he has just put in a 36 hour shift. People used to trust charitable organizations, but now we hear stories about corruption and wasting of funds. People used to trust their pastors. Now many people are suspicious of all clergy, thinking many are child molesters or con artists. And unfortunately, doubt has even made serious inroads into Christianity. Modern biblical criticism has modern theologians doubting who Jesus really was, questioning whether Jesus actually said what is in the Bible or just made up by devout followers.

All this doubt has obscured the fact that doubt is an extremely unsettling thing. If you doubt everything, where can you turn? The world would tell you to turn to yourself because you are the only one you can trust. But if you are honest with yourself you will have to admit that personal experience has taught you you cannot even rely on yourself much of the time, which pretty much leaves nothing, right? Wrong! From our reading we discover there is something that you can trust without reservation. There is something that is guaranteed and certain and rock solid and always effective. It is CHRIST'S WORD.

What we have before us this morning is commonly called The Calling Of The First Disciples. That might give us with the impression that this was their first contact with Jesus. But that is not true. These first disciples, namely Peter, James and John, had already listen to Jesus teach a few times and had seen his miracles. In fact, Peter had even seen Jesus heal his own mother-in-law of a sickness. But these men had not become Jesus' full time disciples yet. It would appear that up until this time they still had some doubts and hesitations about following Jesus with unquestioning faith. That was soon to change.

The text says that Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd had gathered around him and were pressing in on him to hear him teach God's Word to them. Jesus did not want anyone to miss out on his important words. Jesus found a solution to the problem. There were two fishing boats nearby, one of them belonging to Simon Peter. Jesus got in Simon's boat and asked him to push out into the lake a little ways. Peter happily obeyed Jesus - he was undoubtedly pleased to get a front row seat to hear Jesus' words.

It is important to note that before Jesus ever asks Peter to follow him unquestioningly, Peter had heard God's Word from Jesus himself. Friends, that is where we also turn if we are to follow Jesus unquestioningly. We do not look to our own lives and experiences for convincing proofs of God's existence. Rather, we listen to what God has to tell us in the pages of Holy Scripture. We get the story straight from the mouth of the source – from God. After all, how can you trust someone you don't know? In the pages of Scriptures we become acquainted with our Savior and get to know him personally.

Our reading continues: When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch. Simon answered him, Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets.

Think about what was going on here. Peter had been up all night fishing and had not caught a single thing. Any fisherman knows how frustrating that can be. Peter was probably tired and not in the best of moods. He had just finished cleaning the fishing nets, which I am sure he
did not enjoy much, considering how useless those nets had been the night before. Then Jesus, who was an incredible teacher and probably not a shabby carpenter either, but certainly not an experienced fisherman, told Peter to go to the deep part of the lake in broad daylight and throw out the net for a catch! How ridiculous that must have sounded to Peter, the experienced fisherman who had probably been fishing on that body of water since he was little. Peter’s experience told him he would not catch anything. His tired, aching bones told him that net would not be much fun to clean yet again.

But what did Peter do? Despite what his reason and experience told him, despite his skepticism, Peter obeyed Jesus simply because it was Jesus telling him to do this. What trust and respect Peter must have had for Jesus!

And what happened? When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

What a huge catch this was! Imagine how densely those fish must have been packed in that area for the net to be completely full of fish to the point of bursting. What is more, they managed to fill two boats with fish to the point that they were beginning to sink! This was not a typical catch or even a rare catch. This was obviously a miracle and the disciples knew it.

So we learn that the Word of Christ is powerful and effective. When Jesus speaks - when he promises – there is power in those words. No matter how unlikely it seems, no matter how many reasons you can think of to the contrary, Christ does what he says - always. Jesus tells us some things that are hard to believe - things we are skeptical about because of our reason and experience. You cannot find a job? Jesus says, he will provide all you need for your body and life. Are you sick or not healthy? Jesus promises he is taking care of you and this will work out for good. Did you really mess up - a sin that is troubling you this morning? Jesus says he fully and completely forgives that sin forever. Are you troubled by the thought of the prospect of your own death? Jesus promises you will live with him forever in heaven. In all of these, he says: Trust me. For I do what I say. And the Jesus who crammed that net full of fish by his almighty Word, fulfills every last one of these promises to you and me as well.

Look at Peter's reaction to this miraculous catch of fish. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord. Did you expect that reaction? I didn’t. I expected that he might run up to Jesus, giving him a hug, thanking him profusely. But fall at his feet and say: Go away from me because I am a sinful man! Why this?

Peter had this reaction because he was confronted head on with the power and glory of Jesus. He came to the shocking and frightening realization that standing on his smelly fishing boat, in front of him, a smelly fisherman, was the very Son of God himself who could smell all too well that fishy smell of his sinful heart. At this point Peter certainly was not wondering whether or not he should follow Jesus with an unquestioning faith. Instead he becomes painfully aware of the fact that he was not worthy to follow Jesus at all because of his sinfulness and rebellion against God.

Friends, it is equally vital for us to see the glorious power and holy nature of Jesus. We also need to come to the sobering realization that Jesus is not our supernatural buddy we pal around with once in a while. He is the almighty God who created the universe, who is pure and holy and demands nothing less than perfection from us.

Unless we come to grips with Jesus’ glorious power, we will never take his Word seriously. Until we come to realize our sorry sinful state, we will always be putting just a little trust in ourselves which rightfully belongs solely to God. When we see his awesome, holy power, we are humbled, we despair of ourselves, and we fall on our knees pleading for forgiveness for our doubt and rebellion. Yes, the first step in following Jesus with unquestioning faith is first despairing of ourselves and realizing we have no right to follow him, nor expect anything but eternal death and
destruction from the Righteous Judge.

Having trembled at Jesus' glorious power, what does Jesus say to Peter and to us? **Have no fear.** What comforting words these are to people who are despairing and trembling before the almighty God. It is when we have finally humbled ourselves before the almighty that HE reaches out to US in love. We, like Peter, wish for Jesus to depart from us, for we are sinful. But Jesus refuses to turn his back on us. Instead in love he turns his back and invites us to unload our burden of sin onto him - that very sin that causes us to tremble before him.

And so we unload it onto the back of Jesus. Then he asks us to follow as he walks away. As we follow behind him, we see him carry that burden of sin up the hill to Golgotha. We see him nailed to a cross, still bearing our sin on himself. and we see him suffer and die because of that burden. And at his death, to our utter joy and amazement, we see that burden of sin disappear, paid for in full by the Son of God.

As we keep watching, the joy and amazement increase as we see Jesus rise from the dead and come out of the grave three days later. He lives and reigns victorious over sin! Our debt of sin has been paid for in full! The sins of the world have been paid for in full! The almighty God sweeps down out of heaven, scoops us up in his hand and hold us in a loving embrace, showering us with love and affection. We are no longer sinful in his sight! We are holy and perfect in his sight because of what Jesus did on that cross for us. We are no longer compelled to cry out **Go away from me.** Instead we find everlasting comfort in Jesus' words: **Have no fear!**

Then look what Jesus says to Peter. He reaches out to Peter in love with a wonderful invitation and promise: **From now you will be catching people.** Not only is Peter's sin forgiven, but he is invited to follow Jesus and he is told he'd have the privilege witnessing to others of Jesus' incredible love for mankind. Peter was called to throw out the net of the good news of Jesus and gather other people in to know the unconditional love of Christ. And oh, what a fisher for men Peter would become! We know that on Pentecost alone, God used Peter and the other disciples to catch over 3,000 for the kingdom of God!

We are told that Peter, James and John pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus. We see that they followed Jesus with unquestioning faith as his powerful Word changed them forever.

We have heard that same Word of Christ. When you are tempted to doubt, when your faith feels weak and God feels distant, what can you do? When you are skeptical or cynical about God, will you just figure it is good, healthy doubt? I pray not. There is a much better way. Instead open your Bible and get to know your Savior. As you get to know him better and better, you will also get to know yourself better, and three truths will become crystal clear in your mind - three truths Peter discovered on that day on the Lake of Gennesaret.

First you see clearly that God is just and holy, and you are not. That makes you tremble. But you also see that God is love - loving enough that he did not want to see you end up in hell - loving enough that he gave up his one and only Son Jesus to become your substitute who would suffer God's wrath in your place. Third, you see that God has called you to an awesome privilege and responsibility - to be fishers of men - to share his powerful, life-changing word with others - to be the mouth piece of Christ! May God makes us eager, confident, dedicated fishers of men to the glory of our great God and Savior. Amen.

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