Some of the defining moments of our lives are when we really screw up. I have a whole list of these times, but one that I will always remember was from the day after my high school graduation. It was a time of celebration and I had borrowed my father’s beautiful, silver-metallic Pontiac station wagon to pick up my friends and head to the beach. Of course, it wasn’t that simple. Dad grilled me with questions before giving me the keys:

-- You’re not going to drink, right? No smoking in it either, got it?
-- You’ll bring the car back in one piece, right?

What I didn’t tell him was that we planned to paint the car with some colorful graduation messages - which didn’t present a problem for me since we would use water-based tempera paint and take it through the car wash before coming home. A cinch. The problem was, it was a terribly hot day at the beach and the sun literally baked the paint into the finish of the car! The car wash - two times through - only removed a little of the paint which now decorated the car and spelled disaster for me. When I pulled the car into the driveway that evening, my heart was pounding: What is he going to say? How am I going to get through this? I thought there would be a volcanic eruption. But to my surprise, despite his initial shock, Dad was measured and calm. He simply and slowly asked, what in the world happened? Feeling like a complete buffoon, I stumbled to explain the whole failed plan, at which point he began to laugh - probably at my stupidity! Finally, he said, OK, well get out the rubbing compound... and we’ll get the paint out. And he continued to laugh as he relayed the story to my mother and the nosey neighbors! But for me, a miracle had taken place. I was relieved, yes, but there was a deeper imprint, too. In light of his nearly instant forgiveness and understanding, I felt humbled and inadequate: what did I do to deserve this? I had a new awareness of how self-centered this teenage son could be, how half-hearted my response had been so often in the face of this heartfelt generosity. Somehow, it was a defining day.

We have three characters in our Scripture today, and each of them when confronted with the greatness, the goodness and the holiness of God, felt like saps: they became keenly aware of their unworthiness. Peter, upon seeing the two boats nearly sink from the miraculous catch of fish, comes to see Jesus in a new way. He falls to his knees and says, Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. His response echoes the poet Isaiah, who is confronted with God’s majesty shining forth and filling the Temple. Isaiah says, Woe is me, I am doomed. For I am a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips. Paul, in the second reading, is clearly taken aback,
aware that God chose him, he says, *the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

All of us, I think, can identify with Peter, Paul and Isaiah, when we come to that deep awareness of our moral inadequacy: that we have screwed up and failed. Sometimes, we can get stuck there, feeling that our flaws disqualify us from really answering God’s call and serving God’s Reign. Yet our readings today paint another picture, one that offers us consolation and hope. They speak to us of a God who comes to us and calls us, not because we are “good enough,” but because of who God is: God is love. This is the God who is passionately in love with us, who not only forgives us, but uses our weakness to do wonderful things for catching others in the net of his love and mercy.

Look at Paul: the same person who persecuted Christians was forgiven, and in that power was called by Christ to go out and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Look at Peter: a weak, stubborn and seemingly fair-weather friend, who denied Jesus three times after promising otherwise, who turned and wept for his failure. This is the same person whom Jesus called to lead his church, to preach and heal. Look closely at those whom God has called down through the centuries: Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, Matthew, Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene, Francis of Assisi, Augustine of Hippo. All were frail; all were sinners. Yet God worked through their weakness as God works through ours—touching us and transforming us: our actions, our apathy, our attitudes, our unclean lips and unclean lives. God touches with acceptance and encouragement, with warm and gracious words: *I love you. Be not afraid. Now take this love out to the world.*

Today’s Gospel is not simply about a famous moment 2000 years ago by the Sea of Galilee. It’s about right now, in the defining moments of our daily lives. God is always touching us and calling us—warts, weakness and all—through Jesus, with his words, “Follow me.” He comes not only in worship, but in the frustration of hard work where we catch nothing, in the times where it seems we are sinking: God comes not only in washing our nets but in washing our dishes and waiting to pick up the kids from soccer practice; he calls us in the people we love and in people who drive us crazy, even those we call our enemies. He calls us to hear his voice, to bring the compassion and justice of God to a world that needs it desperately.

We come to the Eucharist today to receive once more the gift of God’s liberating love in Jesus, and to be strengthened in hearing God’s call. We pray that we too will surrender and respond in faith with our hearts and lives, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”