

So, there's a syndrome that affects around 70% of people at some point in their lives.

This syndrome can be debilitating, it can cause us feelings of great distress and even lead to self-sabotage.

It's called impostor syndrome.

Has anyone heard of it?

Impostor syndrome is a thought pattern in which a person doubts their accomplishments and has a persistent fear of being discovered as a 'fraud.'

Even though you might be completely competent, have all the education, know all the things, if you have impostor syndrome, you remain convinced that you're a fraud and you don't deserve what you have achieved.

Many people who suffer from this attribute their success to luck or to deceiving others into thinking they're smarter than they really are.

This can be an anxiety-producing syndrome because people start to think that at any point they'll be 'found out' and all that they have achieved will be taken away from them.

Michelle Obama recently wrote about impostor syndrome in her new book, *Becoming*, and she spoke about it during one of the stops on her book tour.

She told a group of students, *"I still have a little [bit of] impostor syndrome, it never goes away, that you're actually listening to me...*

that feeling that you shouldn't take me that seriously. What do I know?

I share that with you because we all have doubts in our abilities, about our power and what that power is.

In terms of overcoming impostor syndrome and having confidence in our abilities,

"Here is the secret," she said.

"I have been at probably every powerful table that you can think of, I have worked at non-profits, I have been at foundations, I have worked in corporations, served on corporate boards, I have been at G-summits, I have sat in at the UN; they are not that smart." (Michelle Obama: 'I still have impostor syndrome,' www.bbc.com.)

I'll confess, there have been times in my life when I definitely had impostor syndrome, and on occasion I still do.

When you all called me when I was a ripe 26 years old, I remember thinking oh boy, they're going to find me out.

I have no idea what I am doing and I am definitely not up to this task.

Some years have passed and the building is still standing and I think our church is doing alright, so I have less of those self-

doubting thoughts than I used to have, but they can be so draining.

Since I felt like an impostor pastor, that got me wondering, is it possible to feel like impostor Christians?

Even though we go to church and pray and try to follow Jesus and learn the stories of the Bible and use our resources faithfully, do we ever still feel like we are not Christ-like enough to claim that identity?

Are we afraid that if we call ourselves Christians, someone else will call us out and challenge us, telling us we aren't true Christians?

Or are we afraid that our faith community will somehow find out what we think and what we say when nobody's watching?

Are we worried that we aren't faithful enough with our resources and we really don't pray that much, and we don't really know the Bible and the charade won't go on forever, and we are going to be found out that we really don't have the right to claim the Christian identity?

Well, here's the thing: nobody has the right to tell you whether you are or are not a Christian.

That is solely your choice.

And, if you're struggling with feeling like an impostor Christian, let me remind you, that you are *here*.

You showed up to this faith community on Sunday morning.

You care enough to be here.

Your intentions are in the right place, and that's enough.

In the story that we heard this morning about Jesus and the disciples, there are two types of people: people on the shoreline and people in the boat.

The people on the shoreline are the ones who are not ready to make the commitment.

They might be curious, they're hanging out and listening to Jesus as he preaches from the boat off shore, but they're safe on land.

They can walk away at anytime.

And then there are the people in the boat.

They made the commitment.

They are in it with Jesus, wherever he takes them.

They are trusting him.

And let me tell you, you're in the boat.

You're here. You're with us.

You're trying, and that's enough.

Why do I say that it's enough?

Well, look at who Jesus called to be fishers of people.

Yes, he called fishermen, but they weren't great at it, at least not this day.

Jesus tells them to take the boat out deep into the water and to drop their nets.

Peter is like, *"Uh, Jesus, we worked all night and caught nothing, but, if you say so, we'll drop the nets."* (paraphrase of Luke 5:5)

The very reason Jesus was able to commandeer the boat is because it was empty, no fish, which mean plenty of seat room for him!

This is like if Jesus had called one of us on our worst days, maybe right after you said or did something regrettable, something you definitely didn't want Jesus to see.

Jesus' timing seems terrible, but that's the thing, it's not.

Jesus doesn't call these men because they've exhibited the gifts and graces needed to follow him and be his disciples (or to be fishermen).

He calls them because he knows that he can work through them, he can do things with them that they wouldn't be able to do on their own.

Peter isn't called to "catch people," (as well discuss in a minute), because he's good at it, but because Jesus can do it through him!

You don't have to have any qualifications to follow Jesus, there's no limit to the amount of slip ups and mistakes you're allowed to make.

We don't get to this point where it's like oh, you messed up one too many times, not a true Christian, definitely an impostor.

That's not how it works.

As long as you're trying, whatever that looks like in your life, that's good enough.

As long as you're open to the spirit working through you, good enough.

If this whole Christian experiment, church, Jesus, community, Gospel message, if it is affecting your life in some way, that's enough.

You are not an impostor because God can work through you to do good works in this world.

That's all Jesus was looking for, as my mom used to say, he was looking for people with potential.

And you have potential.

You're not an impostor Christian.

You know, part of impostor syndrome is that you think other people get it, that they're *really* competent, and soon they'll realize that you're just faking it.

Well let me tell you something about Christianity, lest you think you're the only one who doesn't fully 'get' it.

None of us do.

None of us have it all figured out.

None of us know how to perfectly follow Jesus, or exactly what the biblical stories mean.

None of us know exactly who or what God is, because God is so much bigger than we can even comprehend.

And I bet that when a lot of us pray, we have our doubts about whether there is someone at the other end of the line.

Maybe this is what prevents us from talking about our faith, from telling others about our church, because we're afraid that the more people we tell, the sooner we'll be found out as frauds.

If that's the case, then it's a real shame.

Because every one of us is willing to walk off the shore, roll up our pants, and wade into the water to climb into the boat with Jesus.

Like I said before, I know this about you because you are here.

If you weren't willing to wade into the water, you wouldn't be here.

Maybe the world is losing out because people who would love to be part of our community don't know about it because we're too afraid to talk about it.

Well, Jesus tells us to cast the net wide.

What does that mean?

It doesn't mean sink your hooks into people and then reel them in to church.

It means to be a living testimony to God's love in this world, and to act that way as often as you're able!

It means to be unashamed about your Christian identity, to speak about it, when you feel so moved, and to make decisions based on it, as often as you can.

Casting the net wide means not hiding your values until you're around a certain person or group of people to reveal your Christian identity.

It means living into it as often as you can, no matter who you are with.

It means not waiting until you're good enough or faithful enough to claim the identity of Christian, because you are, you are all of those things.

You are enough.

The spirit of God can work through you and that's all God needs.

You are not an impostor.

I hope you will take this good news to heart and feel emboldened to claim your Christian identity, because the world needs you in the fullness of who you are, so that you can cast your net wide and share God's love with as many people as possible.

Amen.