

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 5C
February 6, 2022
Luke 5:1-11

Fishing with Jesus

3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish. (Luke 5:3-6 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we heard that people were astonished because Jesus' Word had authority. Today we hear that people pressed in on Jesus to hear the word of God. They wanted to hear for themselves "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43). God grant that that would describe us as well.

Now before Jesus was in the boat, Simon and his partners were cleaning their nets after an unproductive night of fishing. They had applied their experience and expertise and had come up empty. They had employed the best of human wisdom and skill and had caught nothing. That they had nothing to show for a night's work is not an indictment against them as though they did something wrong or that they needed to use different techniques. Instead, it was the opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate His divinity, prepare them for their new vocation, and impress upon them that success rested in His Word alone.

And while Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus said on this occasion, we can be sure that it echoed what He had taught earlier in the synagogue at Nazareth when He indicated that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Him. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19). That's the message Jesus had to proclaim.

The crowd that pressed in on Jesus wanted to hear more about the good news and liberty and the year of the Lord's favor. They wanted to hear more of Jesus' gracious working among men. Before them was God Himself come down from heaven. And where Jesus is, there is grace and every blessing.

So, after He finished preaching, Jesus directs Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And, Simon, having heard what Jesus had taught the crowd, responded,

“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” Having heard the Word of God which came from Jesus’ lips, he puts his experience and wisdom behind and does as Jesus said. And the result is a miraculous catch of fish.

And as we think about that, we see that Jesus provided their daily bread, even as He does for us. He blessed their work, their vocation, with success – beyond their wildest dreams. But more than that, Jesus had done what only God the Creator could do; for the catch doesn’t show that Jesus 'knew where to fish', but that He, as almighty King, ordered/brought the fish into the net.

Furthermore, the size of the catch strains Peter's nets to the breaking point. Peter's ability to receive is simply not up to par with Christ's ability to bless, to give. Thus, there’s more to this miracle than meets the eye. For Jesus often uses the physical to demonstrate the spiritual. You are not able to get a net around Christ's salvation; and if somehow you could, Your net couldn’t hold it. And if somebody were to help you, both of your boats would sink! If it's true for a catch of fish, consider how much more it is true for God the Son Himself and the deliverance He brings you. Except God Himself give, build, and preserve the faith, you couldn't believe it: Christ would be to you just a man, Baptism would be just water, the Lord's Supper just bread and wine, and Absolution just words. But because Christ is in the boat, the net holds and you know that these are God's Word, God's body and blood, and God's saving bath.

At the catch of fish, Simon falls down before Jesus and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He recognized that the One sitting in his boat was none other than Almighty God, the Lord of Sabaoth, the one "by Whom all things were made." Like the prophet Isaiah said when he saw heaven’s glory, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Is. 6:5). Indeed, all creation must praise His name in earth and sky and sea, and Simon Peter recognizes in the obedience of the fish that this Man must truly be the Lord and, as with sinful Isaiah, Peter now stood as a sinner before the King's throne.

And what are the words of the King? "Fear not!" "Fear not!' because I take away your reason to fear!" "Fear not!" as the angels said to the shepherds, "since unto you this night is born in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." "Fear not!" as He would say when He had risen from the grave, because His resurrection proved that He had really won salvation on the cross. "'Fear not,' because as with Isaiah, I make you clean"--in evidence of which, Jesus does what He did with Isaiah: He commissions Peter with a new vocation – Peter shall now be a catcher of men alive!

Now it was right that Peter and Isaiah feared to be at the throne of God, as they, like every one of us, deserve to be destroyed at that throne for failing to live as God commands. Yet the coming of Jesus shows that throne to be a place of forgiveness and salvation. Where Jesus sits, there is the throne of God, the place of the King to bring you salvation.

So, this “call” or “commission” given to Peter is to simply put down the net at Christ's direction, to use the tools the Lord provides, and to use them as He has given them to be used. And what

are these tools? The preaching of the pure Gospel and right administration of the Sacraments. And when these tools are used rightly, Christ Himself will head the “fish” into nets as He sees fit. It was not Peter’s place to figure out how to do it better, nor is it ours. It wasn’t given to Peter to figure out how to attract or lure fish into the net, nor is it given to us to do so. That’s not how Christ’s Church works. Instead, Peter was to act in accord with Jesus Word, with its promise of blessing beyond measure; and so are we.

This we too need to learn. For God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is. 55:8-9). And, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (Ps. 127:1).

So, Beloved, as you keep on pressing upon Christ to hear Him, the Lord of the Church will keep directing fish into the net here--that is, to Holy Baptism, where the dead are made alive by drowning their sin and scooping them out of death through the power of Christ's resurrection. And you--you who would have been too weak to bite at a baited hook, you who by grace alone have been netted and brought aboard the great ark of the Church, you He shall keep safely on board, secured the same way as the fish were that day: by the bodily presence of Jesus.

Now a fish out of water is sure to die. But as Christ draws men out of the world and into His boat, the ark of the Church, it’s for life. Being caught in the net of the Gospel is the way to life everlasting.

When Jesus is in the boat, there is nothing but grace and every blessing; for where Jesus is, there is His Word. And where His Word is, there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Church is the boat, and Jesus is here. God grant that we learn evermore to trust that Word, rejoice that He has caught us alive in the net of the Gospel, and that He keeps us alive through that same Gospel to life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener