

Luke 5:1–11 (Trinity V)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
July 17, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

God's Word and God's ways can at times seem completely unreasonable. In God's Word we are told what to do, or God tells us what He has done for us, and it often goes against our earthly, surface-level assumptions. Or God leads us in an unexpected direction by a path we would not have chosen for ourselves. In this morning's Gospel text, Jesus tells Simon Peter, a fisherman by trade, to do several things that go against reason both in regard to fishing and in regard to life. Ultimately, Jesus is telling Simon Peter to trust in Him, to leave all things to God's direction, especially when our fallen human reason is baffled. In Simon Peter and in the others who left everything to follow Christ, we have an example of what faith in Christ looks like, a faith that can overcome our fear and a faith that overcomes the world, contrary to all human reason.

What Jesus tells Simon Peter to do is unreasonable: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon Peter was a professional fisherman. He knew his trade well and he knew that if you're going to catch fish, you have to fish at night and close to the shore. Simon and his crew had just been out all night and caught nothing. And now this teacher, this rabbi named Jesus, was trying to give Simon tips on fishing. But Jesus's instructions are the exact opposite of what a Galilean fishermen would know to do. Usually you would fish at night and close to the shore. But Jesus says the opposite. In broad daylight, Jesus tells the fishermen to cast their nets into the deep. Our Lord's instructions to Simon would have come across as completely unreasonable.

Simon had been washing his nets after a night of disappointment when Jesus came and commandeered his boat to use as a pulpit. Simon listened as Jesus preached to the people. He knew that this man was teaching with authority. Simon trusted Jesus, but then Jesus asks him to do the unreasonable, to do what was completely contrary to experience. Simon answered: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” Simon listened in as Jesus taught the crowd. Simon trusted Jesus, and now it was time to put that trust to the test. Our Lord asks Simon to do what is completely unreasonable, yet Simon trusts the Lord: “at your word I will let down the nets.”

When you reflect on your own life, how often have you experienced that God asks you to believe, say, or do something your natural reason finds to be unreasonable? Maybe the LORD has given you a cross to bear that seems way too big for your shoulders right now. Maybe God has brought people into your life for you to care for, but you feel inadequate for the task. Maybe you find yourself in situations with family and friends where you know you need to stand up for the truth of God’s Word, where you are called upon to give a reason for the hope that is in you. Or you are called upon to suffer for righteousness’ sake. Our lives end up taking a direction that we would not have chosen for ourselves, a hard and narrow way (Matt 7:13–14). According to our own judgment, we might find God’s direction for our life to be completely unreasonable.

It’s the same thing with what we believe about the mysteries of the Christian faith. In the last few months at our midweek study of the Lutheran Confessions it has often come up how God’s Word contradicts our fallen human reason. We learned from St. James to contrast the earthly, unspiritual, demonic reason with the pure wisdom that comes down from above (James 3:15-17). And from Isaiah 55, where God says: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God’s Word is

powerful and does what He says. God's Word reflects who He is, even if we don't understand how it all works. In the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine are Christ's body and blood. Our reason cannot grasp how this is possible, but with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26). God's Word is more powerful than we can imagine. It can do the unexpected. In Jesus Christ, God and man are united. A man sits on God's throne and the blood of God cleanses us from all sin (Eph 20:28). Our reason cannot grasp this, but again, God is bigger than our reason. God asks us to believe, say, and do things that our natural reason finds completely unreasonable.

But look at how Simon Peter responds to Jesus's seemingly unreasonable directive: "at your Word I will let down the nets." Simon Peter trusted the Lord's Word and the result was astonishing. There were so many fish that the nets were breaking and two boats nearly sank! These professional fishermen had not seen anything like this before. Now Simon Peter knew exactly who this man was: not just a teacher, but *the* Teacher, the one teacher, the Christ (Matt 23:10). This was not just a man, but God Himself in human flesh, the Lord of creation standing right before Him. And so Simon Peter did the only thing a fallen and sinful person can do before the holy, perfect, sinless, all-powerful God of the universe. Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The holy God cannot tolerate sin in His presence, and Peter knew this.

When we reflect on God's almighty power and His just ways, we sinners tremble in His presence. When God is in our midst, our own sinful lives stand out in stark contrast. Peter knows from the Old Testament what happens when sinful men approach God unworthily. It usually involves an immediate death sentence. Our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). If even the holy angels cannot approach God's presence without shielding their faces, how could sinful human beings come before the God we have offended? The only way is for God to take away our guilt

and atone for our sins (Is. 6:7). The only way is for God to come to us and pay for our sins with His blood. That's what Jesus came to do, and so Jesus responds to Simon Peter with a word of comfort, a word of absolution: "Do not be afraid."

Sinners have no room to stand in the presence of God, but God has another way, and His ways are beyond our ways. God's ways seem unreasonable to us. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. No, the Son of God took our human nature upon Himself to redeem our human nature. God became man not to condemn us, but to save us. The God-man who causes this miraculous catch of fish is the God who in love became man for us, the God who became man to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the world and rise again from the dead. The God-man standing before Simon Peter is the same God-man who ascended into heaven and is ruling all things and interceding on our behalf at God's right hand (Rom 8:34). There's no need to fear because Jesus Christ, the righteous one, is our advocate before the Father (1 John 2:1).

Jesus still comes also to us with His Word, that very same word of Absolution to Simon Peter: "Do not be afraid." Your sins are forgiven. Jesus does not depart from Simon Peter. Jesus does not depart from us. Instead He draws us to His throne of grace, where we find mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16). On your own you are not prepared to stand before God, but our Lord comes to you and says "Do not be afraid." You are not prepared for the tasks God has called you to, but our Lord comes to you and says "Do not be afraid." Our reason cannot grasp how profound this reality is. Our Lord is preparing Simon Peter and our Lord is preparing you for the work at hand.

Jesus continues, saying to Simon Peter: "from now on you will be catching men." Once again Jesus is telling Simon to do something that runs contrary to human reason. Simon Peter and these fishermen would no longer be casting their nets into the sea to catch fish. Instead, they

would sit at Jesus's feet for three years, learning from the Teacher a new trade. Simon and Andrew, James and John, and the other fishers of men, the Apostles, would then go out into the whole world taking the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to every tribe, and language, and people, and nation. That preaching of the Gospel is like a huge fishing net cast into the world to gather a people for God from all over the world (Matt 13:47).

It's an impossible task, at least judging from our own reason. How could these fishermen go into the whole world as fishers of men, preachers of the Gospel, a complete change in occupation? How could the Church, even today, transform the world and the eternal destinies of lost sinners? The disciples and the Church since then have always been unworthy for the task. But the Lord is faithful. The disciples' work of fishing had ended, but the Lord's work of catching men had just begun. As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians: "consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).

God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). God's power is made perfect in the weakness of Jesus on the cross. God's power is made perfect in Simon-Peter's weakness. God's power is made perfect in our weakness, the church's weakness. In an unexpected way, God continues working through His sinful and unworthy instruments to bring salvation to the world. God continues to work powerfully through the foolish word of the cross to make a people for Himself. The message of the Gospel contradicts our fallen human reason, but that's how God is at work in the world even today.

Once again, Simon Peter and the other disciples trusted the LORD: "when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him." At Jesus's words, these men

were prepared to leave everything behind for a life dedicated to serving our Lord. In faith, they left everything to God's direction, even when that direction seemed to contradict what they thought they knew about reality. That's the way faith works, as much now as it did then. This faith given to us by God is certain of what is hoped for. It is the conviction of what we cannot see or understand with our human reason. In faith we, too, trust our Lord's Word, even when it contradicts our reason. We trust that we are forgiven, even if it doesn't feel like it. We confidently walk the path God has laid out for us knowing that even as He was able to work through the disciples, our Lord will also work through us, His unworthy instruments. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.