

Luke 5:1–11
5th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
July 9, 2023

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,

The reports about Jesus were spreading quickly as He healed the sick, cast out demons, and taught God's Word. The purpose for which He was sent was to preach the Kingdom of God in the synagogues all over the region—to seek and to save the lost. And the crowds began to form. In our Gospel text for today, Jesus was at the shore of the Sea of Galilee and the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God. Jesus used the opportunity to perform a miracle before Peter, James, and John, a miracle that would not only show His divine power over all creation, but a miracle that would also point to the work of the church down through the ages. The miraculous catch of fish is a picture of what Jesus calls His disciples to do and a picture of how the Lord will work through His disciples to extend the Kingdom of God.

The crowd was pressing in to hear God's Word. They weren't pressing in to hear cute stories, clever anecdotes, life hacks, or a comedy routine. No, the crowd was pressing in to hear God's Word. They were lost and without any kind of direction, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:36), or like a flock of starlings in the fields, simply following the individuals around them. There's no detectable rhyme or reason to the movements of such creatures. They seek food and protection in numbers. So it goes with schools of fish as well. One individual follows those around it as the group seeks food and protection from the dangers lurking in the chaos. And so it goes in this sinful, chaotic world as well. Each individual is following those closest to him, seeking sustenance, protection, and direction. Like the sons of Israel worshiping the golden calf,

the people sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play (Ex 32:6). In the chaos and isolation of this world, man seeks to satisfy his desires in the company of others. He lives for the moment with hardly a sense of who he is, why he's here, or where he's going. People tend to live like fish: they only know the chaos into which they were born and they seek safety in a group of those just like themselves.

But the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the Word of God. They sensed something was different with Him. They realized there's more to life than the chaos into which they were born. There's a sense that this world is not all there is. There's something higher, something deeper, something broader. There's a longing for God that God places into man, a hunger for something more than what this fallen world has to offer, a hunger for God's Word that draws people to Jesus. "He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The fact that Jesus teaches from a boat is not without importance. In the Christian Church, a boat is symbolic of the Church in the midst of this fallen world. As the ark safely ferried Noah and his family upon the chaotic waters of the flood, so does the Christian church keep God's people safe as vengeance is being meted out upon the earth. The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He resolved to wipe away sin with the flood. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. He walked with God. And God chose to work through Noah and his family to preserve the order of creation in the face of constant attack. So it is in the church today. The church is the ark by which our LORD rescues the order of creation from the chaos of wicked men. The church is how the LORD preserves for Himself a remnant for the new heavens and the new earth, when things will be set right again.

Think also of baby Moses, who was preserved in a basket made from bullrushes, daubed with bitumen and pitch, and placed into the waters of the Nile river. This miniature boat preserved the baby Moses until he safely entered Pharaoh's household. The LORD preserved Moses that He might rescue His people, Israel, from slavery in Egypt and lead them on dry ground through the waters of the Red Sea and into the promised land. Moses was saved from the waters of chaos that he might be a prophet to God's people. He was a reluctant prophet, slow of speech and tongue. Yet the LORD promised to be with Moses's mouth and teach Him what He ought to speak (Ex 4:12). As the basket preserved Moses upon the waters, that the LORD might work through him to save His people, so does the Church preserve a people for God, that they might declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among the peoples (1 Chron 16:24).

Or think of the reluctant prophet, Jonah, called upon by God to call out Nineveh for their evil. Jonah fled to a boat, but was cast into the sea to calm the waters. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah and preserve His life for three days and three nights until it vomited Jonah out on the dry land. So Jonah went to Nineveh, according to the Word of the LORD, and called the people to repentance. The LORD preserved Jonah, even when he decided to flee, that Jonah might proclaim repentance and the coming of God's Kingdom to a foreign nation. So, too, does the LORD preserve His church; maybe not in a glorious ship but in the belly of a whale. Sometimes that's what life in the church feels like. Yet the LORD is preserving His people for the prophetic message they are to proclaim to the world, a message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus, in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

The Church of Jesus Christ is such a vessel that brings us safely through the waters. As the LORD preserved Noah, Moses, and Jonah through chaos, so too, does the LORD preserve you, dear Christian, through the chaos of this world, that you might glorify His name and bring others into the safety of that eternal harbor. Jesus taught the people from the boat, and Jesus teaches people through the Church, where He proclaims His Word to the nations.

Next, Jesus performs a miracle to show Peter, James, and John—the inner circle of disciples—what they, too, are called upon to do. Simon Peter and his coworkers, the brothers James and John, were fishermen by trade. They knew what they were doing. After a long night on the water and catching nothing, these fishermen cleaned their nets and listened to Jesus as He taught the people the Word of God. When Jesus’s sermon was over, He told Simon Peter: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, *we* toiled all night and took nothing! But at *your* word I will let down the nets.” Simon knew what he was doing. He knew it just hadn’t been a lucky night, but more opportunities would come later. That’s just the nature of fishing. Sometimes you catch something, and sometimes you don’t. Yet Simon trusts the Lord, heeding His invitation even though it seems to go directly against his God-given reason and experience. That’s often the way it works with God. His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God’s ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts (Is 55:8–9). Simon Peter knew this. Jesus had already cured Simon’s mother-in-law, among many others. Simon Peter had heard our Lord’s authoritative teaching. He knew Jesus was more than an ordinary man. So if Jesus says to do something that appears contrary to reason and experience, like to put those clean nets in the dirty water one more time, then Simon Peter will do it. He trusts in the Lord and in the

Word of God more than in his own sense of reality. *We* toiled all night and took nothing, but at *your word* I will let down the nets.

That miraculous catch was so large the nets began to break and reinforcements had to be brought in. Both boats were filled to the point that they began to sink. From nothing to everything, from failure to success, from too little to too much, a miraculous change occurred from the nighttime of man's work to the daylight of Christ's work. He made glorious the way of the sea, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined (Is. 9:1–2). Simon Peter and those with Him could do nothing. They accepted their fate and were ready to move on to another day. But Jesus can do all things. When man's work ends, our Lord's work begins and He works in a powerful way. Man toils all night and takes nothing, but at God's Word, a miraculous catch is at hand. That's the way it is with God. Man is called upon to cast off his doubts and misgivings and simply trust in the LORD. Simon Peter believes, he trusts in God's Word, and so He sees the glory of God at work.

Simon Peter responds to the event, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Simon Peter knows he's not in the presence of any ordinary man; Simon Peter is standing in the presence of the living God, the LORD Jesus Christ, by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth. As the Old Testament saints bowed in fear before the almighty God, so does Peter see the contrast between his fallen, sinful human nature and the perfect holiness of the Almighty God. Yet Jesus responds, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Jesus assures Simon Peter that his sins are covered. Whatever weaknesses and doubts they might have, Peter and the other disciples are given the strength and the skills needed to go from

fishermen to fishers *of* men. Whatever weaknesses and doubts you might have, the Lord assures you with His absolution and gives you the strength you need to move forward.

When they brought their boats to land, they then left everything and followed Jesus. The work before them would be difficult, but they knew it would be the LORD working through them to pull men out of the chaos of this sinful world and into the safety of the vessel of Christ's church. The success of their vocation would be in the Lord's hands, not in their own. And so it goes in the church of God today as well. The servants of God are sent out in big ways and in little ways to bring the nations to Christ and into the holy ark of His Church. Here, in the Church, the LORD is working through His Word to preserve for Himself a people for eternal life. Here, the LORD is preparing you to leave everything and follow Him, that He might work through you to lead others to eternal life. The Church is a refuge for those pulled out of the chaos and corruption of this fallen world. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Fisher of men, casts out His net of the Gospel into the world to draw people to Himself. And the LORD will continue working through you, His Christians, to accomplish the great task at hand. 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.