

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity & Installation of Vicar
St. Luke 5:1-11: "Follow Me."

July 3, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

Almighty God, heavenly Father, without whose aid and blessing all our labors are in vain, we humbly ask You, regard Your goodness and our need, and bless us, that in Your name and with firm trust in You we may patiently and cheerfully labor in our calling, honor Your Word, and evermore praise You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 145)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the word of God, [Jesus] was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and He saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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. And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "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." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. / But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. / And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who gives fullness to the empty and faith to the fearful, dear fellow redeemed:

The brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, were fisherman. That means they knew the lake of Gennesaret—most commonly called the Sea of Galilee—better than anyone. These fishermen knew the best places to fish and the best times for fishing. But when we meet them in today's text, they had just worked through the night without success. All they had to show for their efforts were nets full of weeds. As they washed out the nets, they were tired, discouraged, maybe even irritated. Who can pay the bills with weeds?!

But their attention wasn't totally on their nets. They watched Jesus come down to the shore accompanied by the crowds that were always with Him these days. And as they worked, they listened. Some of these men had met Jesus before. Andrew and probably John were two who

had gone to hear the preaching of John the Baptizer by the Jordan River. They were present when the Baptizer pointed to Jesus and said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God!"* (Joh. 1:36). So they and their brothers knew about Jesus, that He was someone significant, a Teacher unlike the scribes.

This is why Simon Peter was willing to take Jesus a little ways from shore in his boat, and why he was even willing to let down the fishing nets in the deep. Conventional wisdom said that this was neither the time nor the place to fish, and Simon said as much, *"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!"* But he listened and did what Jesus said. And then Simon and his companions hauled in a catch of fish like they had never seen or probably ever heard of.

Now suppose Simon had not fallen to his knees in fear. What if as he was pulling more and more fish into the boat, he hadn't thought about his sins but only thought about the profit that this boat-load would bring? Or about the notoriety and glory he would have? He would be famous for miles around! People would write songs about this day! Simon would be a somebody!

That's always the temptation, to take the glory that belongs to God alone, and to want to apply it to ourselves. We do this when we have success at something, and all we can think is how hard we have worked, how gifted we are, how much we deserve the recognition we receive. When things are going well, when times are good, we don't thank God—at least not first of all. We might remember to thank Him eventually, but even then, our "thanks" can sound like the Pharisee's: *"God, I thank you that I am not like other men"* (Luk. 18:11).

Simon was not wrong to fall at Jesus' feet and confess his sinfulness. That was a totally appropriate response when he realized he was in the presence of the holy Lord. We can learn something from this. In the greatest moment of his professional fishing career, Simon did not bask in the glory of his accomplishment. He was humbled. He saw the gift he had been given, and he knew he didn't deserve it.

But where Simon went wrong was when he asked Jesus to leave him, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"* If Jesus were to leave, Simon would still be a sinner. He might be less aware of his sins, but he wouldn't have less sins. He needed Jesus to stay. He needed Jesus to save him. Jesus wasn't about to leave. He had big plans for this big sinner. Jesus said to Simon, *"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."*

Colin, you are embarking on this same mission. It is your desire to cast the net of God's Word into the sea of this world and catch souls for the Lord. You are ready to apply all your talents, all your abilities, all your ideas and strategies, to this task. You want to be a good fisherman. You want to see the nets fill up with fish.

But there's a problem: You are a sinful man. And there's another problem: The one who is assigned to help you with this fishing, who is even now casting out the nets—he is a sinner too. What are we to do? I'd like to tell you to "Follow me!" "I'll show you the ropes!" "I'll teach you everything I know!" "I'll make sure that when the year is up, you'll know how to fish!"

If that were the case, then theoretically I should be able to teach anyone to fish. I should be able to teach anyone how to be a pastor in God's church. But I do not think that, or if I do think it, I

should be ashamed. The fact of the matter is that even our best efforts fail apart from Jesus. I could be a great speaker. I could be an expert administrator. I could have all the tools for success. But if Jesus doesn't give the blessing, the nets go empty.

The pastor's calling is not to say, "Follow me," as though he can save anyone, as though he can get anyone to heaven. The pastor's calling is to speak Jesus' Word, to point to Jesus. The nets weren't filled because of Simon's skills. He and the others fished all night and caught nothing. The nets were filled because Jesus said, "*Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.*" Jesus filled those nets, and He filled them by the power of His Word.

Every one of you here is a living testament to the power of Jesus' Word. You didn't find your own way into the net of His Church. He caught you in the calm, clean waters of Holy Baptism. Through those waters, He cleansed you of your sins, He claimed you as His own, and He covered you in His righteousness. As long as you remain in the water of your Baptism by faith in Him, you will continue to be a healthy fish, full of life. The baptismal font is your fishbowl – not to keep you from experiencing what the world has to offer, but to protect you from it and to give you what the world cannot give.

Jesus promises to continue feeding and strengthening His fish through the ongoing preaching of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments. This is why every fish needs a pastor. Now a fish could possibly survive without one. We hear so many say that today, "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian!" But a fish does need to stay in the water, and it does need to eat. A Christian needs to return to Baptism through the confession of sin and the absolution the pastor speaks. And a Christian needs to eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus, which the pastor is called to distribute.

Whether or not a Christian strongly feels the need for a pastor, Jesus feels strongly about it. That's why He called Simon and Andrew, James and John, and all the rest of the disciples to follow Him. That's why after His resurrection, He breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld*" (Joh. 20:22-23). And that's why before His ascension, He commissioned them to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Mat. 28:19-20).

Christians have pastors because Jesus wants them to have pastors. And because He wants them to have pastors, He still calls sinful men to follow Him. No man has the power in himself to save even one soul. But Jesus through His Word saves many souls. He fills His Church with fish. The power is His, and the glory is His.

The pastor's or the vicar's responsibility is to proclaim His Word. Jesus' Word does the work. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1Co. 2:2). In the same letter, he criticized them for putting too much focus on the person of the preacher. "*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth*" (3:5-7).

Colin, it will be my duty to remind you this year that you are nothing, just as I am nothing. Jesus is everything. He is the Savior of us sinful men, and of all the sinful people we serve. Without Him and His Word, all the nets of our efforts will come up empty. But with Him and His Word, our work cannot fail because His Word never returns to Him empty (Isa. 55:11). I know you are ready to dive in, and so am I. *“Follow Me,”* says Jesus, *“and I will make you fishers of men”* (Mat. 4:19).

Jesus does not turn any of us sinners away from Him. He does not depart from us in disgust when we fall again and again. He speaks words of assurance and peace to us. When you hear the absolution from the mouths of His fishermen – “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” – that is Jesus speaking. Those are His words. He does not reject sinners; He forgives them. And He calls each one to follow Him in repentance and faith.

It is His Word that filled the nets with fish and His Word that fills our hearts with hope. It is His Word that changed the disciples’ priorities and His Word that gives us purpose. It is His Word that saved the sinners of old and His Word that saves sinners today. *“Follow Me!”* says Jesus. And He gives us the faith and the courage and the will to do it.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +