

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 5:1-11: “The Word of God Gives the Increase.”
July 16/17, 2022 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, You have given us Your holy Word and have bountifully provided for all our earthly needs: We confess that we are unworthy of all these mercies, and that we have rather deserved punishment. But we beseech You, forgive us our sins, and prosper and bless us in our various callings, that by Your strength we may be sustained and defended, now and forever, and so praise and glorify You eternally; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 159)

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 by the power of His Word "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20), dear fellow redeemed:

About the middle of this past week when I was attending our church camp with the youth, Kristin asked me if my time there seemed like work or like a getaway. As much as I enjoy camp—and we do have a good time—I told her that we pastors stay very busy with teaching, preaching, and chaperoning. And it's not always clear what effect our efforts have. Do the campers leave camp with a clearer understanding of Law and Gospel? Have they grown in their faith? Has their love for God and for each other increased? Those things are difficult to measure.

We live in a results-driven society where everything gets measured. The success of a sports franchise is determined by how many titles it has won. Businesses are constantly doing cost and profit analyses to find their way in the market. Individuals are judged by their grades and their personal accomplishments. Even churches fall into the “results” trap and measure the effectiveness of their mission by their attendance totals or by how significant their financial holdings are.

Judged by this kind of standard, we would conclude that Simon, James, and John were not the greatest fishermen. They worked all through the night and didn’t catch a thing. What was the problem? Were their methods faulty? Had they chosen the wrong parts of the lake? Did they try at the wrong time? What exactly was keeping them from success?

But the message of today’s Gospel is not a tutorial from Jesus about how to maximize one’s success at fishing or anything else. The message is that no matter what skill and effort we might apply in our work, no matter what plans we make and what success we have had in the past, we cannot accomplish anything good apart from God’s mercy and the blessing of His Word.

The fishermen hadn’t done anything wrong in their approach to catching fish. They had been fishing for a long time, probably since they were kids. They wouldn’t stay up all night fishing unless they felt confident that the fish they would catch would outweigh the lack of sleep. They couldn’t explain why their nets came up empty. For whatever reason, the fish just weren’t there. They must have felt frustrated as they cleaned their nets on the shore. And tired.

But then something happened to take their attention away from their troubles. A great crowd had gathered on the lake shore. The people were listening to Jesus, that prophet from Nazareth, whom John the Baptizer identified as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (Joh. 1:29). Everyone wanted to hear Jesus and get a good look at Him, so they pressed toward Him. It was similar to how people act around a famous person today, all crowding in to get a picture or an autograph.

Jesus decided that a change was needed, so the people could focus on His Word and not on how close they could get to Him. He saw fishing boats on the shore and asked Simon to take Him out a little ways. From His place in the boat, He continued teaching with Simon sitting there listening. When He was done speaking, He told Simon to row to a deeper part of the lake and let down his nets for a catch.

Conventional wisdom said that if the fish couldn’t be caught the previous night, they certainly couldn’t be caught that day. Simon said to Jesus, “*Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!*” But he had been listening to what Jesus was saying that morning. He recognized that Jesus was a prophet of some sort. “[A]t Your word I will let down the nets,” he said.

He was shocked to see the fish swarming, the nets breaking, and the boats filling. Simon cast out the nets just as he had the night before. The method hadn’t changed. But now he had an abundance of fish whereas before he had none. What was the difference? The difference was the Word of Jesus. Jesus spoke the Word, and He gave the increase. Jesus gave success to Simon. Jesus put fish in the boats.

This should teach us to put our trust in the Lord's Word. Look at what His Word accomplished! It moved the disciples to action even after their previous efforts had failed. It filled the nets that before had come up empty. And it caused them to leave behind their historic haul of fish to follow Jesus. His Word continues to do amazing things like these each and every day. The problem is that we don't recognize the hand God has in supplying our daily needs and giving us success.

We imagine that our work succeeds because of how gifted we are and because of how hard we try. "Look at what I have accomplished," we think. "Look at what my hands have built." But if we take all the glory for our successes, don't we deserve all the blame for our failures? That's not often how it goes. We are glad to receive praise for the good things, but we quickly pass the blame for the bad things.

Or maybe we do see our failure in earthly things as proof that we are no good. We imagine that God frowns on us and that He must be punishing us. We approach our work with a defeatist attitude. "Why should I even try? It isn't going to work anyway. If it failed once, it will certainly fail again."

Both of those perspectives are sinful—the idea that everything good we have is a result of our efforts, and the idea that we're better off not trying anymore when we have failed. Simon was right to fall down before Jesus and acknowledge his sins. Each of us should do the same. We should recognize and acknowledge every day that we are sinners.

When our prideful or despairing hearts have been pierced by the Law of God, the difference between His holiness and our sinfulness couldn't be more obvious. We see that even our best moments in life did not put us close to the glory of God. The thought that we could ever be good enough to get ourselves to heaven is an outright lie of the devil, and it destroys saving faith.

Simon had just pulled in the greatest catch of fish that he had ever seen, but when he realized what had happened, his eyes shifted to Jesus. And when he saw Jesus, he felt as though all his sins were laid bare before the almighty God. He wanted to hide. "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,*" he said. "I am not worthy to be in Your presence. I am not worthy to receive Your gifts."

Simon was right about that. But Jesus did not leave him. He said to Simon, "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*" Simon did not have to fear the wrath of God. Jesus had come to save sinners. He had come to atone for Simon's sins and to give Simon special work—the work of preaching the Word of Jesus. Jesus' Word which had filled Simon's nets with fish would also fill God's nets with repentant believers.

This is a net you want to be caught in, and which you are in through the saving Word. You were lost in the darkness, living without hope or a purpose like so many in the world today. And God drew you to Himself with the net of His Word. He called you out of darkness. He brought you forgiveness and life in the calm waters of Baptism. He claimed you as His own, and He still claims you.

But as you look back through your life, you know how much time you have wasted in pursuing your own plans. You know how prideful you have been when you have done well, and how you have failed to give glory to God for your success. And you know how easily you have given up when everything didn't work out just the way you wanted. What kind of servant are you in the Lord's kingdom? Why should He look kindly upon you? You can understand why Simon said, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*

But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid; I forgive you all your sins. I died and rose again for you. I will not depart from you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." His Word of grace restores you. It lifts you out of your sin and despair. It shifts your focus from the gifts to the Giver, from your successes to your Savior, from the nets full of blessings to the One who fills them.

And when you recognize that **The Word of God Gives the Increase**, then you are ready for the work He has called you to do. You are ready to give your best to your family and your employer, knowing that God has called you to these vocations and will bless your efforts. You are ready to work humbly, knowing that you do not deserve either the opportunities you have or the success.

All the good things you have in this life and in the life to come are from the powerful Word of God. The Word He has spoken makes the sun shine, the rain fall, and the plants grow. His Word brought about your existence through the union of your parents and keeps you going. His Word gives life all around the world. Hebrews 1 says that the Son of God *"upholds the universe by the word of his power"* (v. 3). And His Word brought the light of faith to your heart and makes your faith strong.

The Word of God can do what we consider impossible. It works even when the conditions don't seem right and conventional wisdom says it will fall flat. The Word changes hearts. It comforts consciences. It is always effective. That means as the Word continues to be in your ears, in your mind, and in your heart, God will bring blessings in all that you do.

These blessings are not measurable according to the standards of the world. God's Word may not appear to make much difference. But God is constantly at work through His Word. He promises that His Word will not return to Him empty, and that He will continue to give us blessing upon blessing each and every day.

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.

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