

Sermon for Trinity 5 – Luke 5:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“... Jesus said ... ‘from now on you will be catching men’ ... and ... [Peter, James, and John] left everything and followed Him.” Why choose them? Of all the men our Lord could have called to be his first disciples, He chooses a coarse band of ruddy fishermen. These were tradesmen- skilled in their nautical work. Toiling day and night at this task wouldn’t allow them the luxury of plumbing the depths of philosophy or pondering the Word of God in all its magnitude. They were not experts in the history, customs, or laws of Jewish religion. Christ could have gone to Jerusalem to find such men who were masters of the intellect, but He didn’t. He chose these commoners: Simon Peter, James, and John.

A disheartened Simon Peter washed his nets along the shore line, probably disgusted at another night of no rest and most frustrating of all: no fish. “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch,” the stranger in Simon’s boat said. Not because he wanted to and not because he was thrilled about the idea. In fact, according to human logic, this was the worst possible advice for fishing, especially to an experienced fisherman like Peter. The best fishing was not done in the depths of the open sea, but close to the shore. The best fishing was done at night, but dawn had clearly broken by this time. But at His word, Peter followed the command. Suddenly nets began to break. Small fishing boats began to sink under the enormity of the catch.

But at that moment Simon Peter began to realize something: his heart had sunk far deeper than those ships. His call to the Lord showed this reality: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Peter stood face-to-face before Christ, God in the flesh. The fisherman felt unworthy, but not just a feeling. More accurately, his unworthiness was a present and unavoidable reality. Peter was a common man, a sinner like anyone else. Later in the Scriptures, the Gospel writers tell us when Peter was put to the test, he failed miserably. 3 times he denied the Lord who loved and trusted him.

Thanks be to God that Christ’s church wasn’t built on the foibles and follies of man, but on the sure and solid ground of the confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” The church doesn’t rest upon the man Peter or his morals or intelligence, or ours, for that matter. The Church is a church of sinners, yes, but also the source of forgiveness, where the sinner gets help and cleansing. Peter made lots of mistakes. Even before he was a disciple of the Lord, he knew himself to be numbered among sinners: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” But the Lord would not depart from him. The Lord chose Peter to be his disciple. The Lord still calls sinners and not the righteous to be His disciples. That way, we know He’s serious when He calls us. And, much like with Peter, the Lord will not depart from us.

In response to Peter’s fear over his sin, the Lord comforts him and then issues a perplexing statement: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” Peter

knew all kinds of things about catching fish; in fact, he was exceedingly dedicated to this task. He labored and toiled all through the night. He ran his net all through seemingly empty waters, but then, in the Lord's time, his catch was abundant, even overwhelming. Peter knew about catching fish. But what about catching men? How does one catch men? Well, Peter, if you thought you labored and toiled through one evening trying to catch fish, you will spend the rest of your life toiling and struggling to catch men. If you thought fish were difficult to catch, now here's the real challenge.

Catching men is a challenge, isn't it? We all have family members who don't go to church, who don't think they need to hear of the forgiveness of sins from Christ Jesus, or who constantly deny their identity in Holy Baptism. Do we not feel like Peter, who toils through the night and has caught nothing? Don't we wish that we could see the results of our hard fought labors?

Christ grants these blessings in due time. During our struggles we must take heart in this: the Word of God will not come back empty. The same word we share with our family members is the same word that will strengthen and reassure us in the forgiveness of sins. Yet, should we be so blessed to see the work of God's Word in the calling of some to faith, much like Peter, we can hardly attribute the success to ourselves. Peter's diligence, Peter's wisdom, and Peter's worthiness added nothing to the great catch of fish, and if anything, only stood as a road block and hindered the process. How foolish for us to take credit in any wise for the catching of men, when God's Word does the work!

It's not about our toil. This is what our Lord taught Peter. This is what the Lord would teach us today. It's not about how hard we work or how tired we feel. These things do not matter. No matter how beaten and battered we have been in this life, no matter what we have toiled against the powers of darkness in this world and lost again and again, no matter how lonely, or estranged or despised or sorrowful: it doesn't matter. Jesus comes to us as He comes to Peter: with his Word. So say with Peter, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing. Nevertheless, at your Word, we will let down the nets."

At his Word let down the nets. Let go. Give up. Let loose your grip on whatever ails you. Let go of your own ideas about what to do to make it better and let the Lord do His will. Where there should be no fish, there is a catch so great that it cannot be hauled with only one boat. You have the Word of God! Where there is sin, there will be forgiveness. Where there is loneliness, there will be the Father of all mercies who sets the solitary in families. Where there is hatred, there will be peace. Where there is death, there will be life. Even though you die, yet shall you live. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠