

Pastor T.C. Arnold
5th Sunday after Trinity
Luke 5:1-11
June 30th, 2013

You, perhaps, have heard the comparison of the church to Noah's ark. With the floods that have created great trials and tribulations in the world, God keeps His precious creatures safe and secure inside the belly of the ark – the church. But have you ever stopped and thought about what it must have been like inside that big boat with two of every creature found on the earth? One ancient writing said, "If it weren't for the storm outside, nobody would be able to stand the stench inside."

There's truth to that, isn't there? The church is filled with stinky sinners... and that is what the church is supposed to be made up of... it's the church and that is what it is for. This place is not a club for perfect people who never talk bad about anyone or never plot sinister works that would hurt our neighbors. This is place made up of stinky sinners, who do stinky things... who work to bring the light of Christ's life to a darkened world. And when that is the make-up of the "club"... when that is our job... stinky stuff is going to happen inside the ark.

At the same time, it is necessary and wise at regular intervals on the ship to test for safety... to make sure the engines are working... to make sure the crew takes inventory of supplies and equipment. Inspection must be done on the ship. And if the stench gets too overwhelming—well, that, too, must be taken care of. There are times we have to get the shovels out. And just as for the ship Peter captained had the purpose of dropping nets and catching fish, there are moments when some attention must be given to the boat itself.

Today is such a time. The storms rage outside. The world and all its vices press on her hull. The influence that contradict the Word of God that the world has adopted has caused a stench inside of the church. Something must be done. The boat, the ark, the ship cannot become the world. The ship, the boat, **THE CHURCH** must rise above the world and sail on the winds of God's Word. In the world there is confusion. In the Word we know what God would have for us and what God has done for us. The stinky ship we call the church holds to what she knows.

And we can thank God for that. We can also thank God that our ship stinks. Taking our cues for today's Gospel boat story we can say... and we should say... "Give thanks for the smell!" This is the Lord's will that in all things, **IN ALL THINGS**, we give thanks. The Lord, as we know has taken much worse times and turned them into blessing. That's what the cross and the empty tomb are all about. He can do it again... and He does do it again and again!!

The well-known American philosopher and writer Eric Hoffer once told of his "Thanksgiving" experience while working on a boat dock in San Francisco, California. He wrote, "It is cheering to see that the rats are still around—that means the ship is not sinking." Now, I'm not calling any of you rats. However, we do rejoice that our church is alive enough to recognize people within it with different opinions. People care enough to get excited from time to time. Perhaps we even second guess others, or even ourselves and for that, we give thanks!

Why? Because that means we are in good company. Peter had quite the unusual fishing expedition in the Gospel text for today. Peter, in the ship, second guesses the Savior – a bit of back and forth takes place, "*Master, we toiled all night and for nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.*" In other words, "We've already given it a good try, Jesus. We don't catch fish in the deep water where the fish don't school, Jesus. We never catch fish in the middle of

the day, Jesus.” Troubles abound for fisherman. Troubles abound for those who attend Christ Lutheran Church. Troubles abound for Christians everywhere.

While we are giving thanks for what the Lord can do with our troubles, let us reclaim for ourselves a very basic truth. That truth includes us all. We are all in Peter’s boat which means we are all sinners. That’s such a simple statement, isn’t it? But no statement could be more important for our troubles. Things will continue to go wrong on board ship... whether they on the boat... or in our homes, in our lives, at our work or with our family. Like Peter, we will realize that every one of us has fallen short, and must say, “Lord, I am a sinner.”

There is none who can claim to be all right, nor can we charge another as being all wrong. Paul, in Galatians, charges believers to speak the truth in love and so build up the body of Christ. The first truthful thing we must say is what Peter said. They after saying that, there is hope. There is hope for our lives just as there is hope for fumigating the stinky ark.

We give thanks that Jesus is in our ark... the church. We give thanks that Jesus is in our lives and with us wherever we go. By God’s grace and His gift of faith He comes into the boat where we churn and rock, uneasily trying to live in this death-ridden life... with ourselves... and with one another. He breaks down the dividing walls. How does He do it? Not with words and fancy verbiage. Jesus gets into the boat. Jesus is with us always, in the ark of the church, in the ark of our lives. By being with us Jesus shows us how much He includes all of us in His love and promise. It’s more than just words, beloved in the Lord. These Words of Jesus show us that He is in the boat.

Imagine! Peter, whom one day Jesus would call a devil because he wanted Jesus to bypass the crucifixion; Peter who talked big and ran away scared, later to deny Jesus; Peter who had one story for the Jewish Christians, and another when Paul showed up, causing an uproar in the apostolic church – this Peter the Lord wanted to include in His mission. “*Join Me in fishing for men, Peter.*” That’s love! That’s the Lord’s way of saying I forgive you – you are mine!!

And if He is that way with Peter, I want you to know, He is that way with you as well. Jesus boards our smelly boat and He sails with us. I’m not just talking about on Sunday mornings in this place. I’m not just talking about the other days of the week here. I’m talking about His promise, “*I am with you always to the very end of the age.*” Yes, the stench of the church and our lives gets pretty strong occasionally. We have shovels of repentance. We have washing in baptism. We have life in His supper. We have promises in His Word. We have life in His blood. Jesus binds us together in the ark of the Church – keeping us safe and secure during rough seas. “*Oh Give Thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.*” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.