

5th Sunday after Epiphany
February 10, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Catching Fish and Changing Hearts

Luke 5:1–11 (NIV84)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Fishing can be a relaxing way to spend a day. Sit on the shore or in the boat and wait for the bobber to disappear, showing that a fish has taken the bait. Maybe you get something, maybe you don't. Of course, it is usually more fun to catch some fish than to be shut out and go home without a catch. Some would therefore agree with the saying: The worst day fishing is better than the best day working.

But what if fishing and working were the same thing? Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen. They earned their living by catching fish. Peter provided for his wife and mother-in-law by fishing. If these men had a bad day fishing, they did not make any money for the day. A few days with empty nets could mean that someone in the family would go hungry. A bad day fishing was a bad day working for these fishermen.

Jesus interrupts these men at the end of a bad night of fishing. He is about to change their hearts and help them catch some fish as well as some men.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

These men had worked all night to catch fish and had caught nothing. They would have been tired and maybe a little grumpy after a night of work that literally netted them nothing. Perhaps the appearance of Jesus on the shore was a welcome distraction. They had met him before. John the Baptist introduced Andrew to Jesus and Andrew brought Peter to see Jesus. These men believed that Jesus was the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." They believed that Jesus was the Savior. But had this knowledge worked its way into their lives? Did they know fully what it meant that Jesus was the Christ? Not yet.

At this moment they simply see Jesus teaching a crowd near their boats. Then Jesus imposes upon them, Simon Peter specifically. Jesus gets into Peter's boat and has Peter row a bit from the shore. Now, Peter had been cleaning up the nets after a long night of fishing. They couldn't go home for some rest until this was done. They had to get ready for the next night and hope for better luck. Jesus was intruding on their work time which would throw off their whole day. But Peter goes with Jesus and sits in the boat (not getting his work done) as Jesus teaches the crowd of people.

Peter is not always a great example of Christian living or speaking but this time he gets it right. He does what Jesus asks and spends some time with Jesus in the boat listening to God's Word. I am certain that we do not always get it right. Instead we may tend to compartmentalize our lives. We have an hour or two on Sundays that we set aside as time with Jesus and his Word. This is wonderful. But then we are tempted to think that the rest of our week is time we don't need to be in contact with our Savior. Work time is work time so we don't want Jesus' words about how we are to treat others interfere with getting the work done. School time is school time and we can't let Jesus into school or into our conversations with friends. My time of rest is mine. I don't want Jesus intruding on what I watch or read or do with my free time. Jesus is not content to be in only a part of our lives. He wants to be in every part of our lives.

Christ continues to impose upon Peter with his next request.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

The nets they were washing to put away for the day had to be brought out again. The fisherman who thought they could rest had to go on the water again. And the fishermen who knew where to find the fish were told to fish where they did not expect to find fish. Jesus is going against conventional wisdom here. But Jesus and his Word are very often counter cultural. In many cultures throughout the history of the world, the lives of babies in the womb and even of infants were considered expendable. But God's Word shaped the Jewish and Christian culture to value all life because God tells me that he "knit me together in my mother's womb." Peter let down the nets because Jesus said to. So also we will proclaim the value of every human life in a society that doesn't because Jesus values every human life. Jesus' Word is counter cultural.

He also tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This one is a little more difficult. We want to defend ourselves and perhaps strike back against those who oppose us. But Jesus tells us that vengeance is his domain. We are to love and pray for our enemies. It is difficult to always follow Jesus' ways but Jesus knows better than we do.

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

This is not just a great catch of fish but a miraculous catch of fish. The nets are breaking. The boats are sinking and Peter's heart is changed. He already knew that Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah. Now he really knows who this man is in the boat with him. This Jesus is the Lord himself. He is the Son of God. He is the creator of the universe with power over all things. He is the holy and perfect God. And Peter is terrified because he sees clearly the difference between himself and the Savior in his boat.

Peter is a sinful man. Jesus is the perfect God who must punish sinful men. Peter's attitude has changed

from welcoming the Savior into his boat to wanting his God to go away from him. It is one thing to know that Jesus is our Savior. But it is another to know Jesus as the holy God who must punish sinners.

When we ask Jesus to stay out of certain parts of our life, we are telling the Almighty God what to do. When we go along with popular culture instead of with the Word of God, we are telling the Holy Lord God that we do not need to listen to him. We know better. We are telling God to stop interfering, stop intruding on our lives. If you tell God to stay away enough, he just might do as you ask and that should terrify anyone. For without Jesus we would only be afraid of our Holy Lord God.

But Jesus said to Peter, *“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”* ¹¹ *So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

When our hearts condemn us as sinful people, Jesus tells us, “Don’t be afraid.” For the Almighty Son of God will allow the powers of this world to punish him, crucify him and bury him in our place. The Holy Lord Jesus Christ will be counted as a sinful man as he hangs on the cross so that God will not count your sins against you. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the only one who can truly take away our fear of God’s punishment for he has taken all our punishment on himself.

Not only did Jesus take away Peter’s fear but he also sent him on a different kind of fishing. Instead of catching fish in a net, he would catch men with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter’s heart was changed that day and now he would be used to bring the message of Christ to others so their hearts will no longer be afraid, so that they will rejoice in the forgiveness of Jesus.

This call to full time ministry as Jesus’ apostles was specifically for Peter, Andrew, James and John. We have not been given the specific call to leave our jobs and families and follow Jesus full time. But we are to allow and invite Jesus into every part of our lives. Then the law of God can expose our sin that threatens our eternal future. And then Christ’s words of comfort, “Do not be afraid” can strengthen our faith. And we pray that not only our hearts are changed by continual contact with God’s Word but that those around us also see who Jesus really is. He is the one, true, holy and almighty God who has come to take away the sin of the world. He is our God and our Savior.

For these disciples, the worst night of fishing turned out to be one of the best days of their life. Whatever kind of day you are having while at work, school, home or on the lake fishing, know that it is always good with Jesus. He is the one who changes our hearts from being afraid to trusting in him for our forgiveness and eternal salvation.

Amen.