

February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1-11

“At Your Word We Will Let Down the Nets!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the gifts that the Lord God has given to Pilgrim over her 70 years is the opportunity to share the gospel with many people by inviting them to attend Bible Investigation Classes and Church Services. The Lord has been incredibly good to us by sending new members over the years. However, that is not to say that things are easy. In fact, more and more, it feels like we fish for members all through the night and catch nothing, like what Peter says in our Gospel lesson. There appears to be so many factors against us that would prevent us from catching fish.

Our church and community has been shrinking for some time. Many members have moved far away and we have transferred quite a number of members from this world to the next. And though we do all that we can to faithfully preach the Word, whether it is popular or not in our society, the truth is that we are experiencing what it says in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." People do not readily want to hear what we have to say at Pilgrim because we are not in lockstep with the wickedness of the modern culture, nor are we receptive to the looseness of the so-called "modern, progressive church."

It's heart breaking and frustrating to labor with the excitement of the gospel to only realize that most people just don't care. It's as Paul says in Romans 9:2, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." We know that when people reject the good news of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that they are rejecting eternal life for everlasting death and hell. And they even think we're nuts for saying that. They brush off death and hell as if it were a joke. Still, we know with the apostle Paul that "... it is not as though the word of God has failed." Indeed, the Word of God carries out its purpose whether one believes or rejects it. We just desire that people would not reject it. Here we must leave it all in the hands of God.

Our Gospel lesson speaks about our task to let down the nets for a catch. There are a number of very interesting points that all come together to give us a good understanding of what it means to be in a boat on a lake with nets to catch fish. In this section, we have one facet of what it means to be a church with a job to do that has been given us by Jesus himself. The narrative in St. Luke begins:

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on [Jesus] him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret [also known as the Sea of Galilee], 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.

So, here we have Jesus, fishermen, a crowd of people, two boats on a lake, and nets. Jesus chooses Simon Peter's boat so that he may preach to the people who are pressing in on him. By getting into the one boat, the crowd is no longer pressing in on him and making it impossible for him to preach. For a moment, this boat becomes the place where Jesus proclaims the good news of salvation. His preaching is like a net that he has placed into the crowd that they may be caught by him. Because Jesus is in the boat preaching,

the ancient church correctly saw Christ in Simon's boat as a symbol of the church where believers are caught and gathered. One day Simon and the other apostles would be doing a similar thing. They would be fishermen of living, human beings - living in the forgiveness of sins. To this day, the one, gospel ministry stands in the boat and let's down the net of gospel preaching to catch fish and put them into the boat. Luther understood this when he wrote, "It is our comfort ... that Christ, through our preaching, will lead his own into the boat." This is why the main part of our sanctuary is called the "nave." That Latin word means "boat" or "ship."

The lake is the world. The fish are people. The net is the preaching of the gospel. The boat is the Church of Jesus. Luke tells us that after an all night fishing expedition, where the apostles caught nothing, they were washing their nets. This is interesting because why would one wash nets if they had caught nothing? It's the fish that make the nets dirty. I believe that this is mentioned in our text to show the devotion of the fishermen and that our preaching is to always be ready regardless of what was the night before. Fishermen would wash nets to keep them from rotting. Here we must always keep our nets in the very best condition possible. Our fishing nets which bring people into the church are the means of grace where we find our Savior Jesus Christ. Luther comments:

We have taken refuge in the net of the Church. We are the people pressing upon Christ to hear the Word of God; we were drawn from the sea of the world when the Lord became "my Light and my Salvation." This was done first through Holy Baptism and is done also in Holy Communion. We are to leave everything and follow Him. The holy Gospel is truly a glad message. The storm may howl round about us; bodily suffering, war, human weakness, rebellious will, all surround the Kingdom of God. All human effort seems to accomplish little. Yet Christ lives in his Church. In faith we venture far out into the deep. Christ will fill the net of the Church. It seems that the Church works in vain, but in reality and unknown to the senses a great shoal of fishes is enclosed.

One of the things that we want to note in our gospel lesson is that Jesus is asking Simon Peter to do something that goes against all logic and will be to no avail. Keep in mind that Simon Peter had been fishing all night and they had caught nothing. Keep in mind that fishing was the livelihood of this man and that his knowledge had to be vast. Still, after Jesus is finished preaching, he says to him, "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.

The catch results from Jesus. Our own toil all night long will be to no avail. But in the light of Jesus, who is the light of the world, there will come fish as he appoints. In this case it was so great that the nets were breaking and another boat had to come. And even with both boats, they began to sink. The addition of the second boat expands the work of the Church that Jesus establishes to all Churches that will be. While the catch is great, that doesn't mean that it will always be great from one place to another. We receive what he gives, but all boats involved will bring in the everlasting haul.

The point is this: at the word of Jesus the nets are lowered. It may be that for some time we have been working with little or no results. It may seem that the timing is not right. But prayerfully our nets have been washed and we are ready to cast the nets. We may want to argue that the culture is wicked and that no one wants to hear. We may see ourselves as small and weak. We may be broken hearted and frustrated that our fishing is in a place where it seems that there are no fish to catch. But prayerfully our response to Jesus is simply: **“At Your Word We Will Let Down the Nets.”** And that is what we are bid to do.

God has given us a great gospel net in his Son who became flesh. We have this good news of Jesus who became one of us to suffer and die for all of our sins so that we may reach the destination to be with him forever in his love. We have his resurrection which reassures us that we are forgiven and will live in both body and soul in a new heaven and earth - a place where everything is made right. As far as what happens when at his Word we let down the nets is entirely in the hands of Jesus. All he asks is that we keep our nets clean and let them down whether we think the fishing will be good or bad. And like Peter who sees how sinful he is to even suggest that Jesus may be mistaken for letting down the nets after such a bad night, we humbly see our sin and confess it so that Jesus may say to us: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching [people] men.” He has forgiven us all of our sins and, in that forgiveness, we give it to others.

Luke ends the account by saying: “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.” So, what will it be for us here at Pilgrim? Will we at the word of Jesus continue to let down our nets by inviting people to Bible Investigation Class and Church? Will we still do this regardless of our age and size and when it seems that everything is against us? Will we continue to keep our nets clean and let them down humbly trusting in Christ no matter what the results? Time will tell. Let us then pray that Jesus gives us faith to always do so at his Word. And it is true to say that his Word is always saying to us in the forgiveness of sins, “Let down your nets for a catch.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott