

February 9, 2025

Luke 5:1-11

“Let’s Go Fishing!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our lesson speaks about the church and how the church comes into existence through the proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments and how the church does her work. The task of the church along with the office of the ministry is to keep our fishing nets clean and let them down for a catch. When we come to the good news that our sins have been forgiven, and that Jesus rose from the dead so that we might also rise from the dead and be with him forever in heaven, we are eager for other people to know this incredibly great news! How can we possibly contain ourselves when we know that death is not the end and that there is the hope that what is all messed up down here will one day be made right and we will be with the Lord God who made us to be with him in a forever state of perfection and joy?

And yet, somehow we get tired and worn out. We can get so tired and worn out that we end up in nothing but a maintenance mode where we keep the status quo and don't bother to keep the nets clean and lower them as we should. Isn't that, to some extent, what Peter was struggling with in our gospel lesson for this morning? Jesus is teaching the people from the boat. Then we read: "And when he [Jesus] 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 ..." Luther remarks about how things can get in the church along with her ministers:

When we experience what Peter did, that is, toil all night catching nothing, we tend to become anxious, start to grumble, and become so discouraged that we're ready to run away from it all. We must not give way to such temptation but persist, no matter what, remain at our post, and let God do the worrying. We've often observed that nothing seems to go right, even for good, pious, obedient children. On the other hand, wicked and disobedient rascals seem to prosper and get ahead.

Isn't that the truth?! It seems to me that the false churches and her teachers appear to have God on their side when they go fishing. But they are not throwing out nets to catch living fish. Their fishing method is to throw in some dynamite and collect the dead fish. That's easy work. On the flip side, our work is lowering the nets of the gospel and sacraments, and that is not easy. And the night is often dark and long and the fishing is horrible. But when there is a fish in the net it is truly a wonderful thing!

What do you do when you live in a time where 2 Timothy 4:3-4 seems to be the way things are? What do you do when things are as Paul warned us: "... 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"? It's not easy to have excitement while no one really seems to care. It's also hard to consider what people's rejection of the truth really means, namely, death and hell. Paul says in Romans 9:2 that he had great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart when he saw his fellow Israelites rejecting Jesus and the gift of salvation.

Now, we realize that it is not as "... though the Word of God has failed," as Paul says in Romans 9:6. The Word of God carries the Holy Spirit and will fulfill the purpose for which it has been sent. While we

prefer that the whole world would come to the knowledge and faith we have, we also realize that the Word of God also serves as a judgment for those who have rejected Jesus. All these things we must leave in the hands of the Lord God. Our task, as church and ministry, is to clearly keep our nets clean and keep on letting them down into the water regardless. Here we also are to be like Peter, who after saying “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!” he then quickly added, “But at your word I will let down the nets.” And there it is. Yes, we often toil all night and take nothing, but the nets are clean and the Lord Jesus himself tells us to let down the nets. He will send fish as he sees fit.

What does it mean to keep the nets clean? The nets are the pure gospel. It is easy for the nets to become dirty gospel and even so rotten that the gospel becomes no longer the recognizable gospel at all. The church and her ministers are to keep the gospel in its truth and purity. Here we see how important it really is to know and maintain our confession so that our nets may be let down for a catch. Our fishing nets, which bring unbelievers into the fold of the church, are the means of grace where we find our Savior Jesus Christ. In our gospel text we have a lake, fish, nets, a boat, Peter and his partners. The lake is the world. The fish are people. The net is the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Peter and his partners are the office of the ministry. The boat is the church of Jesus (his flock) and her ministers (his shepherds). 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.

The words of Luther are spot on. All of us have taken refuge in the net that brings us into the boat of the church and her shepherds. We are the people “pressing upon Christ to hear the Word of God ... drawn from the sea of the world ...” and now the fellowship of believers - living fish - the priesthood of all believers who possess all the gospel treasures of the cross. And, through the priesthood of all believers God has called his public ministers to let down the nets in the public assembly. Moreover, you, as the priesthood of all believers, in your vocations, whatever they are, you privately proclaim the excellencies of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:9) your “light and salvation.” Thus, with your lips and lives you still oddly swim with the fish in the world and privately lead them into the net much like the Samaritan woman did when she invited her whole community to come and hear Jesus in John 4, or perhaps like what Priscilla and Aquila did when they took Apollos aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately in Acts 18.

God has given us great gospel nets in his Son who became flesh and suffered and died to forgive our sins and grant us eternal life. We have this good news of Jesus and his cross so that we may reach the destination to be with him forever in his love. We have his resurrection from the dead, which reassures us

that we are truly forgiven and will live in both body and soul in a new creation - the home of righteousness. 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 that the fishing will be good or bad. I like what Dr. Arthur A. Just Jr. says in his commentary on Luke:

Jesus asks Peter to do something that defies all human logic: after a long night of fishing without success to go back out into the deep and let down his nets for fish. In the Old Testament, the depths of the sea have the connotations of chaos, evil, and death. Peter moves into this dark unknown at the word of Jesus ... The word of Jesus creates the great catch of fish. Contrary to Peter's expectations, Jesus shows him that fish are in abundance - in places where one least expects.

Yes. There are fish in places where one least expects them. And, for the catch, God has established his church and the office of the ministry to be about the business of keeping nets clean and letting them down into the deep sea for a catch. This is a joy and privilege, for all of us were at one time fish that were lost at sea. But now we are in the boat of salvation. May God forgive us for the times when we have become tired and worn out. And he has forgiven us and continues to renew his zeal among us in the gospel of Jesus. His love is so powerful that it loves us to love him so that we keep our nets clean and in the water to catch others. The love of Jesus wakes us up (the church and the office of the ministry) to be about the task of forgiving others and bringing them into the boat as we have been so graciously forgiven and brought into the boat ourselves. In this love of Jesus, **Let's Go Fishing!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott