

Net Gains

Text: Luke 5:1-11

Hymn: "Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake" (*LSB* 688)

When we read that Jesus called Peter, James, and John to catch men instead of fish, we're tempted to think the main message is that Jesus wants us to do the same thing. We are now supposed to go out like those disciples did and fish for men, to gather people in to the ark of the church. We have all heard that sermon. And we rejoice whenever and wherever that kind of work is being done.

But, is that the only way for us to see ourselves in this text? That we are called to be the fishers of men like those first disciples, then this text is primarily about living the Christian witness, as being witnesses to the world of all that Jesus Christ has done for us. And that's great.

But this morning I want to help you look at this text with fresh eyes; instead of seeing ourselves in this text as the fishers, what if instead we see ourselves as the fish. Not just as those casting the nets, but as those being caught up in the nets. Now this text takes on an entirely different character. Before I was ever called to be a fisher, I was first of all a fish. When you look at it that way, the text is not just about living the Christian life of witness. It's also about how we became Christians, through the witness and through the fishing of others, all the way back to those first fishers of men, the disciples of our Lord.

Jesus is not content to preach in a corner or to keep His Words a secret. His words are the words of life and his works, especially his death and resurrection, are the salvation of this world. So Jesus does not only the difficult and bloody work of saving

us, He calls apostles and after them pastors and missionaries and teachers and Bible translators spread the kingdom of God, so that the word of the cross may go forth into this world like a net cast into the deep. Like everything Jesus does, his calling of his disciples is for us, so that their words about our reconciliation to God through Christ would eventually summon us, like those fish into the net, would draw us to faith in Jesus Christ, to be hauled into the ark of the church in which we are carried safely to the shores of our home in heaven.

Perhaps you remember Jesus' high priestly prayer the night he was betrayed. He prayed to His Father, I do not pray alone for my disciples, but I also pray for everyone who will believe in me through their word. Even as Jesus prepares himself to go to his suffering and death, what's on his mind is all of us fish that he called his first disciples to catch and to haul into the boat.

Try to imagine that morning on the Sea of Galilee. Peter, James, and John had been fishing all night long, working extra hours trying to catch something but they had been skunked. All that was left was for them to was to clean up, head home for the rest of the day, get some rest, so they could do it all over again tomorrow.

But then they see Jesus coming with his this crowd of people thronging around him. Peter knows it's Jesus, because his brother Andrew had introduced him to Jesus sometime earlier. Peter had also been with Jesus at the wedding in Cana. Peter had become familiar with Jesus and he knew Jesus was a man mighty in word and deed. But Peter is now back to fishing again. In the time in between, had the Lord sent Peter back to fishing? We don't know exactly, but he's back to fishing, not having been fully called yet as an apostle. And as he's getting ready to go home that morning, here

comes that blessed and familiar face. Jesus comes to Peter, followed by the crowd, and he asks Peter to take him out a little ways from the shore. He preaches from the boat. When He's all done, He turns to Peter and stunningly he says, "Peter, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Now Peter could have protested. Actually, he did protest, mildly. He said, "We've been toiling all night and caught nothing." He could have objected more strongly. He could have said, "Besides, Jesus, you don't catch fish in the daytime and you can't fish in the deep. I'll tell you what, Jesus, you stick to preaching and leave the fishing to us professionals." But this is the same Jesus whose word had turned water into wine and so he says nevertheless, "At your word"—not anybody else's word, but at your word, I will do what you say—"I will let down the nets."

That's when the One who spoke on the fifth day of creation and who created the fish in the sea summoned all of those fish into the net, a catch that was big enough to break the nets and nearly swamp two boats. I think Peter at this point is beginning to see what Jesus is up to, that Jesus is making a claim on Peter's life. This huge catch of fish is not intended to bolster Peter in his fishing career. It's intended to put an end to Peter's fishing. Jesus is saying to Peter, "You are mine. And I have much bigger purposes for you."

So in the middle of that huge, flopping pile of fish, as the boats are taking on water, Peter falls to his knees and he begs Jesus, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man." Now in that moment, you would think Peter would have bigger fears on his mind, like the fear of sinking, the fear of drowning or dying, but that is not what is frightening Peter. Peter is afraid of Jesus. And he's right to be afraid of Jesus. If the water

changed-into-wine had not convinced him, this miracle certainly did. Peter is standing in the presence of God. Only God could do this! And his reaction of fear is the same reaction that Adam and Eve had when God came walking in the garden, the same reaction the Israelites had when God came down to Mount Sinai, the same reaction Isaiah had when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, the same reaction Saul had when he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, the same reaction John had when he had the vision of Jesus on the island of Patmos.

The first commandment teaches us to fear and to love and to trust in God above all things. But the presence of God brings into sharp focus how far short we have fallen from that commandment, how we have forced God to take the back seat in our lives to almost everything: the love of money, the pursuit of pleasure and recreation, addiction to entertainment, fixation on family, infatuation with sports, and, most of all, our love of self. God takes the back seat to all of it. It is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God. And if any of us had encountered Jesus like Peter did we would have said the same thing: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinner." For as we say in the explanation to the fifth petition, we know that we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.

And yet Jesus does not punish! Instead, his first coming to this earth, Jesus said, "I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." Instead of condemning us for sin, Jesus takes our sin, He bears our sin, He wears our sin to the Cross. Instead of cursing you, He is cursed. He is afflicted. He is stricken and forsaken in your place. And that's why Jesus can say to Peter, "Do not be afraid." There's nothing for you to

fear. I'm not angry at you. I came to take your sin and to make a way for you to be alive and to live with Me forever. Do not be afraid.

These are the words of absolution. Peter is at peace with God in the presence of God because He's forgiven. So are you. The Psalmist said, "The Lord blesses His people with peace." And Jesus says, "I am nothing to be afraid of. Look, I have been crucified for you."

Jesus is not content to be silent. He wants to be preached. He wants His good news to be heard by you. He wants His name and His grace to echo in your ears and in your heart, because He loves you. And, yes, this text does remind us that we are called to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. But it also reminds us of a time when we were that fish, when the power of God's Word summoned us into the nets that were first cast into the deep by those disciples, and then by pastors, and then by teachers and missionaries and faithful parents and Sunday School teachers, all the way down to us.

Jesus once said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the water and caught all kinds of fish." So, let's rejoice today that we have been included in that flopping pile of fish as those who have been caught in the disciples' net. Like everything Jesus does, He called disciples for us, that we might believe Jesus through their Word and be caught up in their nets so that we never again have to be afraid of God. Amen.

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