

✠ Luke 5:1-11 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

Let me see if I get this straight: Jesus calls us to be fishers of men. We are to go to the ends of the earth preaching the good news of the kingdom of heaven, baptizing and teaching everything that Jesus has commanded us. Boy have we failed. We don't go fishing for anyone. We sit idly by and occasionally when a fish brushes by us we might show him the bait, but we never throw a net over him and drag him into the church. We don't urge our non-Christian friends to be baptized, for most of us don't really trust Baptism all that much. Our wisdom says the Water and Word can't save our souls. Besides, who really cares whether or not someone is baptized? As long as they believe in Jesus, whatever that might mean, for even Satan and the demons know who Jesus is. Most of us don't teach – most of us don't even teach our children. And those who do teach most likely cannot say that they teach their pupils everything that Jesus commands of us, who can do that? Indeed we have failed if we have been called to be fishers of men.

Well, perhaps that's too harsh. Let's be more ecumenical, tolerant, loving, and gentle, after all, part of being fishermen is to not scare away any potential catches who might think that they having been caught might be called upon by the board of evangelism to actually do something evangelistic. So let's call ourselves "casters of bait" instead of "fishers of men." After all, fishermen don't always catch fish; it is, after all, called "fishing" not "catching". Surely Jesus won't be too hard on us if our live wells are empty. He can't expect success every time. And even some of the ones we do catch have to be tossed back because they're too small. And some flip and flop so violently that we lose them back into the water.

Fishing is a hard business, and we're not very good at it. But, then, maybe we're not the fishers of men, or even the "casters of bait" after all; maybe we're the fish.

Jesus has commanded His apostles and they have cast the net. As it is written, "[the Church] is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). That doesn't merely mean that they were the first Christians, but that on their teaching is built the Church of Christ. For as our Lord says, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," and also He says to His apostles, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

So also our Lord says, "The stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone." In other words, building on the death and resurrection of Jesus, who was rejected by man, the apostles laid the foundation of the Church. Not only so, but as St. Paul writes, "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." The teachings of the apostles lay the foundation, build the walls, and set the roof of the holy catholic Church of God.

If this were not so, then today we would find men who were still writing Scripture. But they have ceased; the Cornerstone has been set on the holy hill, in Zion, on Calvary. The foundation has been laid, the walls have been built, the roof has been thatched, and the storms of hell and Hades cannot break it down nor weaken its structural integrity. It is sound. We would do well to remember that we can neither add to nor take away from the Church any stroke of the pen or dot of the "i" for as our Lord says, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it."

It is this then that is that is the net: the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preached to you from His holy apostles and preachers. The net has been cast into the murky waters of sin and death, and you have been caught in the net of Christ.

Peter was not afraid of sinking, he had fought the sea before; he was not afraid of the catch, he'd had large catches before; he was afraid of God. It is telling that his response to the Holy One of God was the same fear-stricken response as the demons': what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? Depart from us. Peter rightly confessed that he was a sinful man, devoid of anything that would make him acceptable to God. Sin is destroyed in the presence of God, and Peter is a sinful being; as are you.

Here stands the Man who is more than a man, a prophet who is not only the Prophet but the prophecy; here stands the Man who is God. And all Peter can say is, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." When you behold the righteousness of God all you can say is, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinner." But sin is not merely passive; it is not merely that we do not love God. Sin is active; it hates God. In our sin we actively reject the Lord of Lords. We do not leave it to the Lord to depart, as if to say, "You are excused, you may go now." But we try to force Him to leave by making a mockery of His Church. There is not one of us present whose mind does not wander during the Lord's Prayer; the pronouncement of Holy Absolution; the Words of Institution, or even while your tongue is still wet with the Blood of Christ. No sooner do we hear the words of forgiveness than our minds drift to football games, last night's movie, this evening's dinner, or our neighbor's wife. We pay Him lip service when we say we bring nothing to salvation, yet all the while we take pride in our tithes and offerings, thinking that we please God by giving Him what is already His. We are impressed with ourselves in the grandness of our synod and church, yet we do not care for the little ones who thirst for righteousness. We pride ourselves in understanding justification by grace alone through faith alone, but we prostitute ourselves out to any church growth byword that floats down the sewage of pseudo-Christian mainstream America.

We profane His name among us when we do not preach His Word in its truth and purity, but in the name of love and tolerance we water down His doctrine and lay waste to His kingdom. We neglect His gift of grace in His Supper and Font by questioning His words and thinking that we do not need His forgiveness. We sinfully think that it is our Supper to be handled, given, and withheld as we see fit, instead of falling on our faces in thankfulness that He has given us His Supper, which He handles and gives.

In our sin, we take the things of creation and elevate it above the things of God. We would rather go fishing than come to His Table; we would rather play games and sleep in than to hear His Word. Excuses are like prostitutes: you know they're wrong and that they cause of all manner of disease and trouble, but, still, they please your flesh. The things of creation, though meant to be a blessing, become a curse. As Jesus' disciples discovered, with so many fish that the catch began to sink their boat, there can be too much of a good thing. There can be too much alcohol; too much sex; too much sunshine; too much fire; too much water; too much cold; too many fish that sink our boats. But there can never be too much of the things of God. There cannot be too much Grace; too much preaching of His Word; too much of His Supper; too much of His forgiveness, and by His infinite grace, even and especially in the face of all our wickedness and hypocrisy, He gives and gives out of the bounty of His eternal goodness.

The fish are afraid; they are dying. Peter is afraid; he is dying in the presence of Holiness. Are we braver than St. Peter? I hope not. We are the fish; and our gills yearn for the poison from which we were rescued. We cannot breath the air of righteousness and so we suffer

death all day long: we are afraid. We flop about in the font into which we are dragged, struggling to get back to the depths from which we came. We think we will be safer in the darkness of the deep, where the Light of God does not expose our sin and guilt. But everything in the sea is prey. There the king is death, and all who roam the sea are subject to him.

And on this side of eternity you cannot shake that fear. Thus, even here in the hull of the Church you still think you have much to fear, for it seems that you cannot breathe. It seems that the hosts of Hell are arrayed against you to devour you, and so they are. Your accusers are always before you, saying that you can't breathe the air of righteousness because you are evil. But the boat does not belong to your accusers. In the Ark of Salvation into which you have been dragged, the King is Life, and all who are in His Ark are safe.

So Jesus says to you, "Do not be afraid." You were not caught by accident, or by your will. It was the will of God. You have been plucked out of the sea of death by the hand of God, by the Right Hand of God. You are weak and dependant, you cannot focus on God or His Christ, but do not be afraid, for God, your God, has chosen you out of the teeming masses of humanity and has rescued you from a watery, eternal grave. And though you cannot understand the grace in which you now stand, you have the promise of Jesus that He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Do not be afraid for He has given His life for yours. He has pulled you out of the depths of death and plunged Himself headlong in. He has given up His holiness so that you may be called holy; He has sacrificed His own life so that you may have life eternal. Do not be afraid. He died for your unbelief; your wandering mind; your lustful eye; your prideful heart; He died for your excuses. No longer do the words of your accusers reach the ears of God for your heavenly Father's ears are full of the words of His Son: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Hear the Word of your Lord; the Word that commands the fish to jump into the net; the Word that commands the demons to leave you be; the Word that changes bread into the Flesh of God and wine into the Blood of God; hear the Word that gives you life. Your sins are forgiven.

The catching of the fish is for the good of the fish. The net, to you, seems to be certain death, but by this death you are joined to the death outside the gates of Jerusalem. We are joined to the death of death that gives birth to life. Do not be afraid, for God is with you. Jesus loves you. Amen.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠