

July 17, 2022
Text: Luke 5:1-11

Fifth Sunday after Trinity

In the eyes of the world, God's people are strange. From Noah building the ark to Joshua attacking Jericho by marching and yelling to John the Baptist living in the wilderness eating bugs, the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven often look and act in ways which the world sees as different – foolish, even.

What leads them to do this? What tells us to act so differently from the “normal wisdom” of the world? Simple: God's word. As we hear throughout Scripture, especially in our readings today, those who follow Christ are called to trust in God's word above all things, in both earthly and spiritual matters. And as we do this, we will not be put to shame, for God's word never fails.

Peter and his fellow fishermen had worked all night seeking a catch. They knew their craft well. They'd likely spent many years, maybe their entire lives, fishing the waters of Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee. They knew where to fish, when to fish, all the worldly wisdom of the fisherman's trade.

Yet for all their wisdom and experience and hard work, they'd come home empty. Nothing to show for their labors and nothing to sell to bring home a wage. Nothing to do but wash the nets and try again tomorrow.

Then along comes Jesus. Pressed in by the crowds, He climbs into Peter's boat and asks if he'll put out from the shore a little ways. And so they sit in the boat, Jesus teaching the crowds – and anyone in earshot, including Peter – about the Kingdom of God.

Once this wonderful teaching concludes for the day, Jesus gives Peter some instructions: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” You have to wonder what thoughts went through Peter's mind at that point. What Jesus has just told him to do is foolish, wrong, a waste of time. All the Galilean fishermen knew that you catch fish in the shallows, at night, not in the deep during the middle of the day.

Peter's sinful flesh probably tempted him to reply along the lines of “You stick to the preaching and leave the fishing to the fishermen.”

But Peter doesn't say that. No, something in what he has been hearing from Jesus leads him to listen and to follow. Maybe part of him figured that he didn't have anything to lose, aside from swallowing his pride and risking looking like a fool to all the other fishermen for taking fishing advice from a rabbi.

Yet part of Peter's words and actions undoubtedly come from a growing trust in Jesus, a belief that Jesus' words are true, even when he can't explain or fully understand them. And so Peter replies: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word I will let down the nets.”

At the word of Jesus, the nets go down into the deep. And at the will of Jesus, those nets are immediately filled with fish!

Faith in this seemingly-foolish word has resulted in abundance, so much so that the nets are breaking and not just one, but two boats, are filled to nearly sinking. Human wisdom and toil produced nothing, but the word of Jesus has brought about plenty.

The same truth, the word of God being that which brings true blessing, holds for us today just as it did then. And it often appears just as foolish to the world today as it did then.

What wisdom does the world offer when it comes to prospering in this life? “Work hard and give your best, and you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to.” “If you love what you do for a living, then you’ll never have to work a day in your life.” “If you can dream it, you can do it.” I’m sure you’ve heard plenty of other sayings like these. As far as they encourage a good work ethic, they can be helpful, as man is to work and not be lazy.

Yet the world’s wisdom puts man in control. If you do enough, then you are certain to get what you want. They also put the focus on man’s desires and fulfilling those desires, be they money or comfort or status or pleasure. These desires, though, are ultimately temporary, having no eternal value.

And what’s more, nothing in this life can be guaranteed by man. Much that we like to think is in our control actually isn’t. You can spend your whole life building something up only to have it all swept away in a moment.

Retirement funds wiped out when the market plunges. Years of employment and dedication vanishing with a company buyout. Decades of experience in a craft or skill made obsolete with technological advancement. And at the same time, you’ll watch people get lucky breaks and seemingly skate through life with minimal trouble or effort. Fishing the entire night, and having nothing to show for it.

Yet the same Jesus who knew Peter’s struggle knows yours as well. He knows what you require in this life. Addressing this very issue, Jesus says, “For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”

When we pray that Our Father would give us this day our daily bread, that’s not just wishful thinking. That is the Holy Spirit at work, both bringing our requests to our Father and at the same time reassuring us that He will give us exactly what we need for the sake of His Son.

With His infinite power, there is nothing that can stop Him from providing for and caring for His people. In His perfect knowledge and wisdom, He gives us exactly what we need when we need it.

If He would have granted Peter a successful night of fishing, then Peter may have been too busy selling his catch to let Jesus teach from his boat. But through Peter’s seeming failure, the Gospel was able to be proclaimed to many.

The Lord likewise uses hardship to teach us and bring about His good and gracious will. If we got everything we wanted, if our efforts always paid off like we want them to, what need would we have for God? If we spend all our time on the broad and easy path, we’ll all the more resent the straight and narrow which leads to paradise. Just like a loving parent knows that his children need to eat their vegetables and get their tetanus shots, God our Father knows that sometimes periods of testing and trial are what’s best for us.

We may very well not understand in the least why certain troubles come our way, but we have the sure and certain word of Jesus that even such troubles are being used by Him for good. When Jesus knows is right, He will give us blessing – true blessing – even to overflowing, like the nets and boats overloaded with fish.

This promise of God isn't only for earthly concerns but also spiritual ones. The word of Jesus brought a miraculous catch of fish to Peter, James, and John. But do you know what is even more miraculous? That the word of Jesus caused them to walk away from that incredible – and very profitable – catch to become fishers of men.

On their own, that would have been impossible. Sinful man wants to put his hope in what he can see, be that literal boatloads of fish or a paycheck in the hand every two weeks. Yet at the word of Jesus, the hearts of Peter, James, and John are transformed. “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

We who are also disciples following Christ are likewise made fishers of men. In our Baptisms, God has transformed our hearts by His word joined to water. And we want other people to come into the Kingdom of God. We want to catch them and pull them into the ark of the Holy Christian Church alongside us.

Yet when it comes to how we go about fishing for men, like with getting our daily bread, we're tempted to follow the wisdom of the world rather than God's word. After all, God's word has many parts that are unattractive and offensive to the sinful world.

Right off the bat, you have the teaching that the whole world – all people of all nations, tribes, tongues, and so forth – are sinners in rebellion against the only true God. It is also offensive that there is only one God, only one source of truth, irrespective of whether or not you believe it, agree with it, or even understand it.

Furthermore, the Gospel doesn't promise prosperity or pleasure in this life, but rather states that, “In this world you will have trouble.” God's word also prescribes much on how people are to live, act, and speak, not just “live and let live.”

And perhaps most offensively, this Gospel says that no one can save himself or even do good works by himself. In today's world, there is nothing more offensive than refusing to validate a person and praise him for who he is, yet this is exactly what God's word refuses to do. Instead, it says that God and God alone must remake a person, that we must be cleansed in the blood of Christ, that apart from being begotten as a child of God, nothing else matters.

Saying all of this is, in the world's wisdom, nothing short of institutional suicide. Countless voices throughout history have said that the Church must get with the times or die.

The Church needs to be more “relevant,” and “entertaining.” Stop telling people that they're sinners and instead say that “God loves you just the way you are.”

Make the preaching and the hymns less about what God has done in Christ and more about me and how God makes me feel so good. Throw out all that stuffy old tradition which suggests that people today could learn something from the countless generations of faithful Christians who went before

them and instead bring in as much of today's culture as possible, because we, the United States of America in 2022, are obviously the pinnacle of human civilization.

Above all, stop preaching Christ crucified. That's depressing. Instead, speak on victory and overcoming and blessing. Give the people what they want!

The thing is, though, the Church doesn't exist to give people what they want. The Church exists to give people what they need. People need the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus came to save sinners by dying on the cross for them.

And because Jesus loves all people, He doesn't leave it to us alone and our "wisdom" to gather in the lost. No, He works continually with His almighty power to grow and sustain His Church.

Jesus is the one who brings people to Himself through His word, whether read, preached, taught, or joined to water, bread, and wine. Jesus is the one who transforms hearts to make people set aside the things of this world and pursue the things of eternity. Jesus is the one who has made us fishers of men, giving us the Word and Sacraments for our net to catch people for the Kingdom.

Just as it was He who caused all the fish to fill Peter's nets, He is the one who will bring His lost into His fold. In faith, we cast the net at His direction, trusting in Him to work just as He always has. He has promised that even the gates of Hades will not prevail against His Church.

Will the world mock us and call us out of touch and say we're fools for listen to a rabbi on fishing advice? Sure they will. The sinful world has been mocking God's word since Satan first asked Eve, "Did God really say?" and it will continue until Christ returns in glory.

Yet those words Jesus spoke to Peter are spoken to us as well: "Do not be afraid." This seemingly-foolish word of Jesus in which we trust contains the power of God and the wisdom of God. As Christians, we leave everything in Christ's hands as we follow Him, both the things of this life and those of the life to come, for our God cannot fail.

In the name of Jesus, amen.