

Trinity V, 2006  
Text: Luke 5:1-11  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Can you hear the weariness in Peter's voice in the Gospel lesson for today? Peter knew his trade well. It was the family business – he and his father and brother had been fishing for as long as Peter could remember. Long hours mending nets, long nights casting them, haggling with the fishmongers for a good price. He knew how to judge the weather on the lake by looking to the skies in the morning and evening. He knew how to sail a boat and judge his direction in the darkest night by gazing at the stars.

He knew all these things and yet the night before Jesus came to preach by his dock, Peter and his brother had caught nothing. They toiled all night long – sailing here, rowing there, casting out and pulling up the heavy nets a hundred times and yet finding them empty. They worked as hard as ever and had nothing to show for it.

And then comes Jesus. He tells Peter to put down his nets right here by the shore. This is foolishness and Peter knows it. He knows the lake quite well – and he knows you don't catch fish that close in to shore in the daytime. It just doesn't happen. He knows that the time to catch fish was the night before in deeper water. He knows that he worked all night and nothing came of it. And so can you hear the weariness in Peter's reply, “Lord, we have toiled all night and caught nothing.” And yet Peter has the beginnings of faith in this Jesus and he goes on to say, “But at your word I will let down the nets.”

And then a miraculous catch of fish where they should not have been. Peter understands what this means – this Jesus is Lord of Creation, able to call what is not into being. And Peter knows that he is not worthy to stand before the Lord of Creation, so he falls down and begs that the Lord would depart from him, a sinful man. Here Peter shows that he understands holiness – that holiness cannot abide sin's presence, that God's glorious presence is the death of the sinner.

As it was with Peter, so it is with you. Have you not felt the weariness of life's effort creep up on you? “Lord we have toiled all night and caught nothing” could be the motto of mankind. After forty years of a “War on Poverty” the poor

are still with us. After sixty years of the United Nations wars are still with us. And these large scale failures of mankind only serve to highlight the small scale failures common to all men. After a thousands tries to reign in your temper, you still lash out in anger. After promising never, ever to say such cruel things again, there you are cutting down your neighbor behind her back. You make up a plan to get to church more often, to say your prayers everyday, to pay attention during the service – and still you fall short, your mind wanders, you let yourself get too busy. “Lord we have toiled all night and caught nothing.”

Repent. The lesson Jesus teaches Peter and us today in the Gospel is that by own efforts we can do no good thing. If left to our own devices, our own labors and toils, we catch nothing. What an obvious lesson – and yet one that is so hard to learn! How many times have I heard even Christian people say, “I’ve tried my best so I know God will take care of me” or “Yes, so and so was such a good person you just know that they are in heaven now.” As if our toils and labors could catch us God's favor and love! No, a thousand times no. Our efforts gain us nothing before God, because as Peter learns here today, God is Holy and we are not. He is perfect and we are not. Peter knows the right response to this fact: “Lord depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”

You see, God is not interested in how hard you try. He is interested in perfect holiness and obedience. And this you do not have. It is like a very bad but very sincere engineer building a bridge – if the bridge doesn't hold up the cars that drive across it, do you really care, does it really matter, that he tried his best? Is he a good engineer if he tries his very best but always fails to build a bridge that works? So it is with fallen mankind. Even if you really did always try your best – and in your heart of hearts you know that that isn't even true – still, you constantly fail to live up to God's standard. Like Peter you must learn to say, “Lord we have toiled all night and caught nothing.”

But do not stop there with Peter's words, continue to speak with him, “But at your word Lord, I will let down the nets.” Peter has a mind set on repentance, on turning away from his efforts, on giving up on his toil – instead he will trust the Word of the Lord. And in that he finds what all his labors could never give him. What Peter toiled for all the night long, what he sought with every ounce of his strength but could not attain – is given to him by a Word from the mouth of the Lord.

Well, as it was with Peter, so it is with you. What your toil and effort could never give you – holiness, perfection, righteousness – is given to you by the Word of the Lord. For in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God – and then the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And then the Word made Flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, walked this earth in holiness and righteousness. And then the Word made Flesh poured out all his effort on the cross. He toiled all that Good Friday long to purchase with his holy

precious blood and innocent sufferings and death what we could never purchase: our salvation.

And so you are in the same boat as Peter. His efforts could not catch the fish, but a Word from Jesus gave him the fish. So also, you cannot earn your salvation, or holiness, or righteousness – but a Word from Jesus gives you all these things. For just as Jesus is Lord of Creation and all the fish of that lake were his to give, so also is Jesus the Lord of Righteousness, and all the holiness is his to give. And he gives it to you. He forgives you your sins – he earned the right to do so by dying for your sins on the cross. He washed all your failings and sins away in the flood of his blood. And he has now brought you this salvation as he plunges you into baptismal waters where he makes you clean in his sight. And now he gives you himself here in the Lord's Supper – the Word made Flesh, the Lord our Righteousness, is here to fill you up with himself for the forgiveness of your sins, for the strengthening of your faith, for life everlasting. This is how you live: just as Peter did – from the gifts of the Lord, not from your own efforts. That is the Christian life: a life of repentance and faith, a life of continual return to the Lord's grace.

So if you, like Peter, are weary from your own efforts; if you like Peter, find yourself to be a sinner who struggles and falls – then come, receive Jesus. He is here to forgive you and give you strength – to give you what you could never catch on your own: salvation, righteousness, life with God. At the word of the Lord, let down the nets, let down your defenses and simply come to the Lord's Table to receive him and with him the forgiveness of your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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