

1 Trinity 5 – Luke 5

This miraculous catch of fish teaches us that our duties are not in vain when they are blessed with the Word of God. It wasn't because they couldn't find anything better to do that Peter, James, and John became ministers of the gospel. That may have seemed to be the case had Jesus not performed this great miracle. After all, they had been working all night trying to catch fish, and they caught nothing. They were frustrated. Their work seemed to be in vain. Maybe this ministry with Jesus would be a better gig. What have they got to lose? But Jesus performed this great miracle to teach them that their labors are not in vain. Whether God calls you into his public ministry to preach his gospel and administer his sacraments or God gives you other work to do, he will see you through. He will provide. He will bring forth fruit. He will bless your work with his Word.

Jesus had been teaching from the boat. What did he teach? We taught the good news of God's kingdom. He taught about the Father who provides all things. He taught about the Son who came to give his own flesh and blood for the life of the world. He taught about the Holy Spirit who gives us new birth and eternal life in Christ. He taught about the forgiveness he came to win for all sinners. Jesus proclaimed his Word. So when he told Simon Peter to take the boat out into the deep water and let the net down for a catch, Simon Peter relied on what Jesus said. He held on to Jesus' Word.

The catch of fish was so big that the nets started to break and the boats started to sink. Any frustration about their day job was instantly replaced by overwhelming amazement. The Word of God blessed their work. Before Jesus called them to work as laborers in his harvest, before he sent them to preach his gospel and administer his sacraments, he first taught them a valuable lesson about work. Work is a gift from God. While we may earn our wages before men, we don't earn our daily bread before God. This miracle teaches that every fish they had ever caught or would catch after that was provided by God. All things are created and held together by the Word of the Lord. So if his Word is blessing your labor, then you can know that your work is a blessing. You can do your duty with a good conscience, knowing that it is prepared by God, it is pleasing to him, and it serves your neighbor.

This, of course, is not how the world sees work. For work to be valuable in the eyes of men, it must yield visible results. This is how our sinful reason measures it. How much money do you make? How many people pay attention to it? How much influence or authority to you have? These will determine how important your work is in this world.

But God does not see as man sees. God values our work, because he gives it, not because you earn anything by it. He is pleased when you scrub the toilet, when you change a diaper, when you help take out the garbage, when you make an honest trade, and when you sweat and toil to bring home food. This isn't because of how good or efficient you are. It is because of your faith in his promise. He has given you this faith, which clings to Christ at all times. Your faith blesses your work, not because it is so great a work from you, but because it rests in him who perfected all work. Christ toiled while sweating drops of blood on that awful night of his betrayal. He did the work God gave him to do, obedient to the law of love all the way to his death on the cross. And he has given you his Holy Spirit who begins his good work of faith in your heart, promising to work in you what is pleasing to God. So you can know that God values your work, even

though you fall short. Any sin that still stains your work is covered by the blood and righteousness of Christ.

When you have confidence from God's Word that he is pleased with you for Christ's sake, then this shapes your perspective on the work he has given you. How often have you toiled all day or all night, yet the job isn't done? The house is still cluttered. The papers are still piled up. Customers still complain. And resources get more expensive. But you know that you are serving your neighbor, and this is much more valuable. You know that if God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, then he will continue to provide. If you are certain of this, then you can take courage. Make it your aim to please God, knowing that he already declares you righteous for Christ's sake.

Not only does work become frustrating when it doesn't seem to yield visible results. It also becomes overwhelming when the workload seems too big. This is another thing the miraculous catch of fish teaches us. Just as the nets break and the boats sink, so do our labors become overwhelming and difficult to handle. Take the task of childrearing, for example. Only an unbeliever would deny that children are a blessing from God. But these blessings require attention and discipline, which can seem like anxious chaos at times. Any work you do is going to have breaks and tears in it. But the most overwhelming part, which makes your heart sink the lowest, is when the devil attacks your conscience. Perhaps your workplace expects you to give your approval of sexual perversions. Or maybe you are tempted to cheat and behave dishonestly. Your peer or coworker is being slandered, and you are pushed to take part in the gossip. As the culture around us increasingly rejects the Word of Jesus, you are pressured to keep things secular and not let on what you believe about your Savior. These trials should teach you what Simon Peter learned. They should teach you that you are an unworthy sinner who cannot handle what God places on you. You cannot please him by your own strengths and powers.

Peter wasn't only speaking for himself when he fell before Jesus and said, "Leave me, Lord! I am a sinful man!" He was also speaking for his fellow fishermen too. They all stood in fear as sinners before God. The burden of the work is meant to teach you this. The opposition of the devil is meant to teach you this. Your own breaks and tears, your own failures and sins are supposed to teach you this. You are by nature a sinner who stands guilty before God.

But Peter was wrong to ask Jesus to depart from him. He was despairing. He was losing hope. He was giving up. To desire God to leave you is the saddest desire. Yet it is all too common. People lose hope when the work becomes overbearing. They can't handle what God has given them. The pressure to remain faithful to God's calling is too heavy, and the trials are too fierce. So people fall away from the faith, and some even kill themselves. But Jesus did not let Peter despair like that. He said to him, "Don't be afraid." That is to say, "Take courage. I give you peace with God. Your sins are covered. Your guilt is taken away. No one can harm you, since I am giving you the kingdom of heaven."

And then Jesus calls Peter into the ministry of the gospel. He says, "From now on you will be catching men." By saying this, Jesus is teaching his apostles that their labors as his ministers will not be in vain. God's Word, which he gives them to preach, will accomplish what it sets out to

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accomplish. Even as his law drives sinners to repent with terror, his gospel will tenderly draw them into his embrace, giving them repentance unto life. His Word will create faith. And even when it seems like the nets of the church are tearing while people reject the faith, he will not let his gospel be robbed of its power. He will continue to draw fish into his net, keeping them safely in the care of his Word until they die.

This account of Scripture is therefore a great encouragement to the ministers of the church who preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Every faithful pastor should take great comfort in knowing that the ministry entrusted to him does not depend on his own skills. Even as he works to improve his studies, his preaching, and his care for the flock, he can take courage in knowing that the Word does all the work. And the more he learns how unworthy he is of this great work, the more he can take refuge in the gospel, which saves his soul. As Paul says, “We have this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power comes from God and not from us. (2 Cor 4:7)”

This is also why it is great encouragement to the whole church. The Word you confess in your daily life will not disappoint. You can be prepared to defend it to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, knowing that your conscience is ruled by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The nets of the church on earth may seem to tear as people lose interest in the truth. Boats may seem to sink as little congregations get smaller and even close their doors. But Jesus promises that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. Wherever his Word is proclaimed there are the sheep of his pasture. When you pass this on to your children, when you explain the truth to your neighbor, when you support your fellow Christians who are trying to hold the heavy nets, you can know that God is working through his gospel to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify his church.

Finally, the most important lesson to learn from this miraculous catch of fish is that we are all the fish. We are the people Jesus promised Peter and the other apostles they would catch. In his great prayer before his passion, Jesus says:

I’m not asking for them only but also for those who through their word will believe in Me, that they all may be one. As You, Father, are in Me and I in You, let them be in Us so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (John 17:20-21)

The greatest miracle of this story was that the disciples left everything to follow Jesus and that his gospel was proclaimed to poor sinners just like you and me. It is the miracle of faith created by this gospel, the miracle that Jesus calms our fears, just as he did for Peter, James, and John, giving us the assurance that our guilt is taken away and we are declared righteous before God for his name’s sake. He has caught us in the net of his Word, and he will keep us in his care.

So take courage in the Word of Christ. Apply it to the work God has given you to do. Take refuge in it when you face temptations and trials. And let nothing move you as you always abound in the work of the Lord, since you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). Amen.