

Sermon Trinity 5 2021

July 1, 2021

Luke 5:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

As I read Scripture, I often think something that is helpful is to try to put ourselves in the shoes of the people in the story, to humanize the people in these stories. I obviously spent a fair amount of time doing that last week with Joseph and his brothers, and this is another good time to consider that as well. I think about the response of these fishermen and the call where they left everything to follow Jesus. What do you think their thoughts were when Jesus said, **“from now on you will be catching men?”** I can imagine they wondered what this meant. Of course, they had just seen a miracle. Peter all the more had seen his mother-in-law healed just before this in Luke, so we can understand how they would pick up and go. And there they were, called to be fishers of men. And what does that even mean? Well, I think you know. And if you don't I'm sure you can make the connection with the imagery here. They were called to cast the net of the Gospel of Christ to gather fish into the boat of the Church out of the depths of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Now as I describe that, I think we all know that I'm describing what we would call the mission of the Church, right? That is what the Church is here for. The Church is here for the rescuing of drowning humanity to be brought into the safety and refuge of the Ark of the Church from the sea of sin, death, and the devil. How does the Church do this? By the forgiveness of sins. That's why I talk about Christ's death for you every week, that's why I tell you your sin is forgiven every week, because that's the only thing the Church does that no other organization in the world can do. Yes, we're supposed to be moral and upright people in the Church, and we're going to talk more about that next week, but this is the mission of the Church: the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because as Luther says in the Catechism on the Lord's Supper, “where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.” Because that forgiveness brings the people into the boat. That's the mission. That's the calling to which the disciples were called.

Now as I say that, I'd like for us to meditate on that mission a bit today, and to do so in view of this passage by applying it to three areas: that mission of the Church broadly for the individual Christian; that mission of the Church in light of the Office of the Ministry; and that mission in light of this Word of God.

So first, the mission of the Church broadly for the individual Christian. I already made the point the Church's mission is this forgiveness of sins and the bringing of people into the Ark of the Church by that forgiveness, but what does this mean for you? There has been a strong push for individual missions over the past couple of centuries in such a way as to make you the individual Christian the one responsible for the perpetuation of the Church. It's your job to go out there and get people in here. Is that a right understanding? When Jesus calls Peter to become a fisher of men, is He saying that you, Christian, are also that fisher? I think we have to be nuanced about how we understand that. Why? Well, I think when we misunderstand this call it can lead to us feeling so much pressure to bring people in that we are misled to think that the Church then must accommodate whatever perceived changes are needed to make the Church more appealing.

So, how should we begin with thinking about this? First, who brings people into the fellowship of Christ's Church? Do you? Do I as the pastor? Do those people do it on their own? Well, we could get into all kinds of language about instrumental causes and efficient causes and that sort of thing, but let's keep it simple. Who brings people into the Church? The Holy Spirit does. It's His job, right? He's the One who creates faith, He's the One who sustains it. He's the One who does the work. Now, how does He do that? How is faith created? Where does He promise to create faith? By the Word and Sacraments, right? By the Word in the Scriptures, by the Word proclaimed, by the Word attached to the waters of baptism. As I always say, you want to be sure you have the Holy Spirit, you look there.

So what does that mean for you in terms of the mission of the Church? It means that you certainly have a duty to live faithfully as a Christian. It means that you have the call to live according to God's commands—which we'll talk more about next week as well. But you have that duty, not in light of the mission of the Church per se, but because you're a Christian. However, those commands include the Second Commandment. Which one's that? Do not misuse the Name of the Lord Your God. That means, in part, that you are called to know what the Word says so that you can speak rightly about who this God is. As Peter says it, always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. You don't have to be a professional theologian, but you should be a theologian and confess that faith, know why you believe what you believe. And love your neighbor as the last seven commandments tell you, first of all just because God has loved you, but also so that in that love you might have the chance to give the greatest gift of all, the hearing of the

forgiveness of their sins in Christ. That's your job. That's it. You don't have to make it super fancy. Like I said, you don't have to be as articulate about it as a theology professor, but know it so you can speak it.

Then the Office of the Ministry, how does that connect? Did you hear where the Holy Spirit was promised to be? Preaching, Scriptures, Baptism? That's the Office of the Ministry. When Jesus tells Peter he'll be a fisher of men, He's calling Peter into the Office of the Ministry, into the public work of that office. In other words, Jesus is calling Peter to be a pastor. Now to be clear, Peter was an apostle too. He was a whole lot more than I am as a pastor. He had apostolic authority in that call and in His eyewitness experience with the life of Jesus. My call is mediated through the Church. Peter, his call was immediate. There was no mediator. That call came from the mouth of Jesus Himself. But the authority's the same: the keys to the kingdom of heaven, the keys to bind and forgive sins. That's my call, right? As the Church has this mission to bring people into it by forgiveness, that's what I do on behalf of the Church, publicly. And through that, through that gathering of the Holy Spirit as He comes to us in Word and Sacrament, here you are: the Church. Those here in the Ark of the Church, rescued from sin, death, and the devil. That's the public Office of the Ministry. And God has given it for the Church.

And how does all of this come together? That Word of Jesus. That Word that we as Lutheran Theologians call efficacious. That Word that is capable to do and does exactly what it says. I love that how you see this in this lesson. As I spoke about the human aspect here, think about being Peter. He's been out fishing all night and caught nothing. He's exhausted and ready for rest. But here Jesus says, "throw out the nets again." "But Lord, we haven't caught anything, really?" Then he thinks about this Jesus and how Jesus healed his mother-in-law. **"But at your word I will let down the nets."** And that Word did what it said. It worked in Peter the action of putting the nets in the water, and it worked in creation that action of the fish being caught in the net. Peter wasn't thinking it was going to happen, but it did. It did because this is the Word that carries the authority of the creator Himself.

I point this out with regularity, but think about creation. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, then He spoke. He said, **"Let there be light."** And what happened? There was light. That Word did what it said. And so for you as well in this Church. "As called and ordained servant of the Word I forgive you all of your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." And what happens? Your sin is forgiven. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed took

bread, and when He had given thanks broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said, ‘take eat, this is my body given for you for the forgiveness of sin... take drink, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.’” And what happens? There is the body, there is the blood, given for you, shed for you in wafer and in chalice. To what end? The forgiveness of your sins! The Word does what it says.

But we forget it, don’t we? We doubt it like Peter, don’t we? We forget what Paul says that this Word is folly to those who are perishing. We forget that of course this Word seems powerless because the world around us thinks it’s moronic. I was reading a part of a book this week that was talking about the New Atheists. I don’t know if you know about that movement, but it was big in the 2000’s. Especially it was centered around Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens among a couple of others. And these guys were rabid atheists. They would say things about how religion is the greatest harm, that it’s the most dangerous thing out there. Why? Because it causes people to go on crusades and blow up buildings—of course ignoring the multitude of great things the Church actually has done. But still, the mindset is that this faith is moronic. It’s dumb. It’s foolish.

And that can discourage us. It can make us think the Word won’t work. We look at the culture around us and how churches are shrinking all over the place, and that can discourage us and make us think that the Word won’t work. It can make us think that the Word needs our help to be more palatable. But this Word carries the authority of the Creator. It carries the authority to do what it says, and it brings that forgiveness, it brings that salvation. In that God Himself comes to you. He comes to you through His Word, through this jar of clay in front of you that the Holy Spirit has called to you. And He comes to you and strengthens you in Him that you can carry His love into the world around you. And He has promised the gates of hell will not prevail against Him, His Church, His word. And just as those disciples, just as Peter was a broken and fallen human, He comes to you broken and fallen as you are, and He makes you anew in Him just the same. He does this in this Christian Church, doing the work of the mission for which He sends her. Amen.