

February 7, 2010

Epiphany 5

"Deep Water Fishing with Jesus"

LUKE 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Try to imagine the excitement that Peter and the other disciples had when their nets were filled with a huge catch of fish. There were so many fish the nets were in danger of breaking and two boats were in danger of sinking with the huge loads of fish. And it happened in deep water where it was almost impossible to catch the fish when nets were let down into the water.

This large catch of fish in deep water should not surprise people like us who know Jesus and have seen his glory with eyes of faith. By God's grace you believe the miracles of Jesus really happened. You have seen the man born blind whose eyes were opened to see and recognize everything he saw, even though he was seeing things for the first time. You have seen the man lame from birth healed by Jesus jumping up and down and taking his bed home with him. You have seen the deaf man who never heard a sound in his life healed by Jesus, hearing sounds he never heard before and recognizing them, even understanding words and speaking words plainly. With the eyes of faith you have seen 5,000 hungry people eat heartily from five small loaves of bread and two fish and filling their stomachs. You have seen the twelve baskets filled with the leftovers.

The Lord Jesus who brought the fish into Peter's nets is the same Lord and Savior who miraculously brings people into his church in these last days using the net of God's Word. In some places large numbers of people come to believe, and in other places they come in one by one. This morning we want to go fishing with Jesus, deep water fishing. We want to see the glory of miraculously catching all these fish and also the glory of catching people for the kingdom of God.

See the glory in catching many fish

Jesus loved to go fishing for people. He threw the word of God into their lives like a net cast out into the lake. Look at Jesus as he teaches God's Word near the Sea of Galilee. To help people hear better he steps into a boat and puts out a little from the shore. Today we might use amplifiers and speakers and microphones to increase the volume of our voices and help people hear God's Word. It is through the Word that we bring people into the kingdom of God. As a church we are always looking for more ways to bring to bring more of God's Word to more people more often.

After casting out the net of God's Word, Jesus turned to Peter and the other fishermen who were washing their nets after a hard nights work. He tells them, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Here was a carpenter telling fishermen how to catch fish. This past summer we had the interior of our church painted by a skilled painter. Imagine an electrician or plumber telling the painter how to do his job. Even the little boys who helped their dads with fishing knew that the way to catch fish was to lay out the drag nets or cast out the casting nets to catch the fish that came into the shallow waters to feed, especially at night. In those days they did not have the large boats and mechanical equipment to drop huge nets into deep water and drag them across the bottom of the lake.

And what is Peter's response to this strange request of Jesus to drop the nets into the deep water? He doesn't chuckle or crack jokes with the other fishermen who might have said, "What does this carpenter know about fishing?" No, in child like faith and trust Peter says, "Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets for a catch." Jesus promised Peter that if he let down the nets he would catch some fish even if it was in deep water where it was almost impossible to catch fish. Peter trusted the words of Jesus for a catch of fish just as you trust the words of Jesus that you find written on the pages of the Bible, God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, that you have come to love and cherish so much in your lives. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31)

Can't you see Peter encouraging the other fishermen to row out to the deep water and let down their nets even though some of them were skeptical and doubtful? Peter knew their would be a catch of fish, maybe enough to fill a basket or two because Jesus had promised there would be fish in the net. "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." They had to use every bit of muscle power they had to pull in the nets, nets that were teeming with fish. If they pulled any harder the nets would start to tear. So they signaled to their partners. They shouted and waved their arms for them to come as quickly as possible. How many fish were there? We are told two boats were so full that they began to sink. These were no little rowboats or dinghies. They were large enough to carry Jesus and his twelve disciples across the Sea of Galilee without sinking, and here they are filled with flopping fish, so many fish they are sinking. No fisherman had ever seen such a catch of fish.

Do you believe in miracles? Oh, dear Christian, you do! Your whole life is built on miracles that the Lord your God has done on your behalf. You believe that Jesus and the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit were involved in creating the oceans and seas and rivers and lakes, and filling them with fish. The Jesus who create the fish and made them the

beautiful creatures they are, is the same Lord and God who directed the fish that swam in the Sea of Galilee into Peter's net so that nets were breaking and the boats were full.

You believe in miracles. The Lord Jesus who directed the fish into the net is the same Savior who was able to perform a miracle when he died on the cross for your sin and mine. You believe that at certain time and place Jesus was able to take every sin you ever committed upon himself and then make a full payment for sin so that you can stand righteous before God. We were born into this world thinking that this method of saving us was utterly foolish as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, "The preaching of the cross is to foolishness to those who do not believe." We were like skeptical fishermen who chuckled and joked about lowering nets in the deep water during the middle of the day.

In the latest *Forward in Christ*, there was an article describing how jaded we were in our thinking when it comes to fixing our problem of sin by ourselves. How foolish I would be if I thought some duct tape could fix a leaking pipe in my house. I came into this world thinking I could fix my problem of sin. Then the Lord opens my eyes to see how foolish this is by telling me, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." I don't have what it takes to fix my life but Jesus does. God opens our eyes to believe in the miracle of the cross and the miracle of the resurrection from the dead. He reveals these miracles to us on the pages of the Bible and opens our hearts to believe in them.

The Lord Jesus who directed the fish into the net is also the same Savior who directs people into his church through the teaching and preaching of his Holy Word. There are times when large numbers of people come into the church and the nets are full. There are other times when the net is pulled in and there are only a few fish in the net. The Lord is in control of his church. He has given us this promise in Isaiah 55: "My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

See the glory in catching many people

Peter was overwhelmed with the large catch of fish, and even more overwhelmed at how sinful his life was in comparison to the glory of God that he had just seen with his own eyes. "When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Peter falls at Jesus' feet and calls him Lord. He knows he is in the presence of the almighty God. He is overwhelmed by his guilt and unworthiness.

Something similar happened to Isaiah. In our Old Testament lesson we heard how Isaiah received a vision from the Lord with the Lord seated high on his throne and seraphs calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah's reaction to this vision of God's glory is to be overwhelmed as Peter was by his own unworthiness and lack of glory in his life. He confessed, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord the Almighty." In the vision Isaiah sees one of the seraphs take a coal from the altar and touch his lips. Then the seraph speaks these comforting words, "See, this has touched your lips, and your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for." It is God who does the atoning, the forgiving and the removing of sin. We have nothing we can offer God to make ourselves worthy. We are nothing but ashes and dust as Abraham once

confessed. The Isaiah heard the Lord God himself speak from the vision and say to him, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Isaiah responded, "'Here am I. Send me.'"

Peter heard Jesus say to him, "Don't be afraid." We don't have to be afraid if we have Jesus. The past is forgiven. The present is exciting. The future is guaranteed. Our lives have meaning and purpose. Jesus told Peter, "From now on you will catch men." On Pentecost Peter would stand up and speak to people about Jesus resurrection from the dead, and 3,000 came to faith in one day. Philip the evangelist was sent to an Ethiopian man and he explained the words of Isaiah 53 to him and he believed and was baptized. Sometimes the net is full of people captured by the Word and the blessings of baptism, and other times there is only one person in the net.

I am holding in my hand a fishing rod with a lure on the end of it. Our job in these last days is not to lure people into the church with bait and switch programs or modern marketing tools that pull in the crowds. Our job is to lower the net of God's Word in their lives and believe the words of Jesus that tell us we need to be ready to see him bring people into his kingdom. This morning we are privileged with Peter to see God's glory in a net full of fish. We are privileged to see the glory of God as he brings people into his church. Praise be to God! He allows us the privilege of lowering the nets in the water to fish for people as Peter once did. Amen.