

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 5:1-11 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Being successful and doing what Jesus did are not one-and-the-same. Farmers, don't learn to farm like Jesus, according to whose parable would scatter seed recklessly without regard for the condition of the soil on which the seed lands. It's a waste of seed, and the Sower reaps from only a quarter of the soil on which he sowed. That kind of reckless farming might make the seed manufacturers happy, but it won't help your yields. Frankly, it's a pretty foolish way to sow and harvest.

2 Don't try to shepherd like Jesus, either. What kind of shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to search for one lost sheep? The risk is too high. Cut your losses. Let the sheep go; it's just a commodity, anyway. And worse is Jesus' description of Himself as the Good Shepherd: "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." Really? A dead shepherd, no matter how good he might have been, can't do much for the sheep. It's a foolish way to take care of sheep.

3 Fishermen, don't learn from Jesus how to catch fish. Simon Peter knew better. The best fishing on Genassaret was at night. He was willing to let Jesus teach from the boat, put off the shore just a bit. That was Jesus' thing, teaching. Who was Simon to question His methods? But when Jesus finished teaching and told Simon to put out into deeper water and let the nets down for a catch, he was a little bothered; fishing, after all, was Simon's realm. "Master, we toiled all night and have nothing to show for it. If the fish couldn't be caught at night, certainly it's even more foolish to try in the heat of the day. But at your word, I will let the nets down." Who fishes in the middle of the day? It's a foolish way to catch fish.

4 Churchmen, don't learn from Jesus how to take care of your churches. There are better models. Do a demographics study to find out where people are. Meet their felt needs before you minister to their spiritual needs. If Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, you better be able to produce the signs and wisdom they respectively seek. If people want small groups and a Jesus who will make them feel better about themselves, you need to deemphasize corporate worship and quit preaching about downers like sin. If they want self-help messages and racy sermon series to improve things in the bedroom, preach what fills the pews. If you want your congregations to grow, get rid of stumbling blocks and folly. Those are downright foolish ways to grow a congregation.

5 Repent. If it were your congregation, you could grow it however you wanted. If it were your seed, you could scatter it however you wished. If it were your flock you could shepherd it as you wished. If it were your boat and your net, you could fish more discriminately. But none of it is yours. God has called His ministers to sow the seed of

His Word seemingly recklessly and everywhere, regardless of the soil or the prospects for harvest. He dispatches undershepherds to shepherd like the Good Shepherd, seeking after every lost sheep, giving up lives for the flock. And he called His apostles to be fishers of men, fishing not with bait and lures but with nets.

6 No bait has drawn you, but you have been caught in the net of the Gospel. No bait, no lures, no attractions, no savvy marketing campaign or winsome sales pitch, just the net of the Lord's Word and Sacraments. It catches without discriminating. It has caught you, rebellious though you were, deaf to the Word of God and blind toward His goodness toward you. You were caught in the net of the Gospel through Holy Baptism and hauled into the boat of the Lord's Church. The best illustration of the pure gift of the Gospel is the baby who kicks and screams at the font, dragged against his sinful will into the safety of the Church, just as you were.

7 It's foolishness, pure foolishness. "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

8 That God would take human flesh in the womb of a virgin, that He would dwell in the midst of His creation, that He would take all of human sinfulness upon Himself, that He would be nailed to a cross and executed, that His death would pay the penalty for your sins, and that He would join you into His death and resurrection through the ordinary water of Holy Baptism, is all foolishness. You'll never package it slickly enough

to sell it. You'll never convince someone to believe it, just as you were not given faith by anyone's sales pitch. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in my Lord Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true Christian faith. You have been caught in the dragnet of the Gospel, snared in the forgiveness of sins, and pierced with the Lord's gift of faith.

9 The foolishness continues. Jesus didn't depart from Peter because of his sinfulness, although that would have been fair. He stays with the sinner. He came for sinners like Peter and you. And He continues to come to you in the midst of your sinfulness, in the midst of your need for Him, giving you His own Body and Blood to nourish and strengthen you in the faith. It's foolishness to your reason that mere bread and wine could deliver the Body and Blood of the Savior. It's foolishness that God cared about you enough to send His Son in the flesh to die in your place. It's foolishness: Christ crucified; thank God for that.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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