

## 1 Trinity 5 – Luke 5

Jesus sat in the boat while he preached. This boat had been used all night in a futile attempt to catch fish. Peter said, “We toiled all night and caught nothing.” By itself the boat can do nothing. Without a good captain at the helm, it tosses and turns with the waves, it gets overwhelmed, and it sinks. While Peter, James, and John sit on the shore disappointed by their failure to catch fish, the last thing they want to do is get back in that boat. Yet, Jesus chooses to sit in it. He chooses it for his sanctuary, his pulpit, and his dwelling place as he declares his living words of Spirit and truth. By his Word, he turns this vessel of vanity into a soundboard for eternal life.

So it is with every poor congregation where Jesus chooses to dwell. This is what makes the church the church. Wherever Christ is, wherever his voice sounds forth, there is his church. Where his gospel is proclaimed, there is his pulpit. Where his body and blood are distributed and eaten and his death confessed, there is his altar. Wherever his saints gather around the preaching of his pure Word and the administration of his sacraments, there is his church. He dwells in the midst of her, no matter how little she seems to accomplish in the eyes of the world.

A little congregation often won't make the headlines unless it gets caught in a salacious scandal. She might draw some positive attention if she does something good for the surrounding community. And that is certainly a good thing. Christians should serve their neighbors. Members of the church should use their gifts to show mercy all around them. But the net our Lord gives us to cast out, the net he promises will catch fish, is not community service and mercy projects, as good and godly as these things are. The net Jesus casts out from the boat is the net of his Word. It is his Word, which calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies people in the true faith. He catches men alive, saving them from condemnation.

It is his Word, which catches people and gives them life. And his Word is easily despised by this world. It's easily ignored, easily rejected, and so often attacked. But Jesus doesn't give his church any other net than his Word. So this is what the church does. This is what makes her the church. She guards the words of her Savior, confessing them and proclaiming them.

When the church and her ministers preach the truth without apologizing, it isn't uncommon for her to get lectured by those who fancy themselves experts on public relations. After all, the masses often don't respond well to what the church preaches. She declares that there is salvation in no one else than Jesus Christ. This offends those who want to treat all religions the same. She declares that God made man male and female. Even this is offensive to contemporary ears. She acknowledges one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and those who see baptism as nothing more than an outward ceremony are turned off by this teaching. The church of Christ speaks the truth, and the truth seems to alienate and scare away the fish.

So the experts in public relations come to the rescue. They tell the church to be more winsome. You know, they say, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Don't draw so much attention to such controversial topics. Just speak vaguely about God's love and how Jesus gives meaning to our lives. Don't bore them with high-minded doctrines, like that Christ is true God and true man, or possibly offend them by talking about sin, wrath, and atonement. Instead, attract people by telling them that you are a

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warm and welcoming community, but don't be too assertive about what you teach. You might scare them off. Yet the only thing these winsome know-it-alls are doing is trying to sell you bait.

But Jesus doesn't use bait. No, all Jesus has given us is the net of his Word. This Word is simple enough for a child to grasp. There are a host of simple hymns any child can learn in very little time. The Catechism summarizes the very basic teachings of Scripture, which the head of every home can teach in a simple way to his household. Jesus preaches in the boat of his church from the shore, calling the humble to hold onto his simple words of grace and salvation. But he doesn't keep us in the shallow water. No, he tells Simon Peter to launch out into the deep. He wants us to grow in our understanding of his Word. He sends us into the deep end.

And this is good, because people need the depth of God's Word. This isn't necessarily because they have so much intelligence and depth of knowledge. It's because they are drowning in the deep pit of unbelief. Those who are deep in the darkness of their sin, deep in the fear of death, deep in the sea of lies and dishonesty from this deceitful world – they need a net that reaches the very depths. And that's exactly what the Word of our Lord does. This is why the church cannot be afraid of diving deeply into God's Word.

That the Son of God is true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit is not just some nerdy detail for bookworms and academics. It is practical truth for every sinner. The Son of God became a man and remains a man even after his ascension into heaven. This means that he remains our advocate and righteousness before the Father. He bore the wrath of God in the place of every sinner. He rose from the dead. And he joins us to this very death and resurrection by our baptism, the washing of water with the Word. He calls us to faith by his Holy Spirit who only works through the words and promises of God. He gives his body and blood for us to eat and drink in bread and wine, for the assurance of our salvation and a true confession of his name. He teaches us to live lives of repentance and faith. He calls us to bear our cross, teaching us that our pain, trials, and afflictions work out for our good. All these truths revealed in Christ are great mysteries. Yet, they all serve the sinner in his weakness. Every article of faith acts as a thread in the net, woven together by Christ himself, to catch men into eternal life.

There are many who buy into the temptation that we should water down our confession. Their reasoning goes something like this. People are going to be lost if we don't gather them into Christ's kingdom. What matters is that they get to heaven. So let's not get bogged down by all the details. Just give them a simple version of the gospel.

This may sound reasonable at first. But we should not be fooled by this. After all, what so called details get left out? Maybe people don't like what we teach about marriage and the sixth commandment. They don't like what we teach about baptizing babies and its power to save. They don't like what we teach about the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. They don't like what we teach about the Holy Spirit working only through the Word. They'd rather sing shallow songs about how we feel about God than doctrinal hymns and liturgy that teach the faith. They would rather talk about their own experiences than recite the words of the Creed. So the idea is that we cut these things out or trim them down so that we can give them the basics? But

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before you know it, the basics have been trimmed down to a thread. What then are you left with? Only a broken and torn net.

Of course, it can seem like we get bogged down with the details. When we speak the truth and people respond with disagreement and hostility, it can be daunting and intimidating to give an answer to all the questions and misunderstandings of the truth. When left to our own devices, we can't handle the number of fish rushing at us. The net tears. Our boats sink. We can't handle the catch of fish Christ's Word pulls out of the deep. Simon Peter was so amazed by this great miracle that he fell at the knees of Jesus begging him to leave. He wasn't worthy to stand in his presence. He was a sinful man standing in the presence of the righteous Lord of all.

But Jesus does not leave us with broken nets. He allows Peter to realize how unworthy he is for this great task. But then he assures him, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men." And so he doesn't leave his church and her ministers to pull the nets up by themselves. When we preach and confess his Word, he promises that we are indeed catching men. We are catching people alive. It doesn't always seem like it, but this is exactly what the Word of our Lord is doing.

St. John records that, after Jesus was raised from the dead, he appeared to his disciples at the Sea of Galilee, the same place where he called Peter, James, and John after the miraculous catch of fish. This time, they were joined with some other disciples. Just like before, they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. Jesus called out to them from the shore and told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. They caught 153 fish, and this time their nets didn't break. This is written for our comfort. While our efforts to speak and articulate the teaching of our Savior are weak and often break, his Word cannot be broken. He will call all whom he has chosen for eternal life, and no one will snatch them out of his hands.

So we cast the net of our Lord's Word. We cast it into the deep. And we can depend on him to work according to his Word. Not one jot of the law fell to the ground. Not one of our sins slipped from his grip. Not one of his bones was broken. And he will not let anyone snatch us out of his hands. He is with us in the boat by his Spirit and Word, his body and blood. And we do not need to be afraid. Because he is catching us alive in his net. Amen.