

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Peace, Sun Prairie
February 10, 2019
Epiphany 5

Luke 5:1-11
There will be a catch

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people (just) as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There's an expression many a person who enjoys fishing has used after an unproductive day on the water: "Well, that's why they call it *fishing* and not *catching*." Even with the best fisherman, on the best days, there's no guarantee of a catch. It's fishing, not catching.

But all that changes when Jesus is in the boat. When Christ speaks His powerful word of promise: **There will be a catch.** Because Jesus says so: **There will be a catch.**

But it all seemed so unlikely. **Peter** and his partners must have been tired and frustrated after working all night with nothing to show for it. Understand this wasn't a hobby. And it wasn't sticking on a worm on a hook and then kicking back with a drink in your hand waiting for a bobber to go under. This was back breaking work—sailing, rowing, throwing and hauling nets.

What Jesus told them didn't sound likely either: **“Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch.”** All their experience—and you must have experience if you're running a two boat fishing business—all their experience said it was a waste of effort to fish under the bright midday sun. Plus you'd be better off in shallower water, rather than hoping to stumble into a school over the deep water.

What's more, our reading doesn't describe the type of large net used in deeper water, since that was pulled to the shore to empty it as we hear in other places in the Bible. By saying **nets**, it might be describing the smaller one person casting **nets** thrown by a single person, a net used in *shallow* water, not **deep water!**

At the very least, they are fishing in the wrong place at the wrong time, and likely with what seems like the wrong tools! To human eyes it looked pretty hopeless.

And yet **there will be a catch!** Why? Because *Jesus said so: ...let down your nets for a catch.*” And with Holy Spirit worked faith, Peter answered: **...at your word I will let down the nets.**

God’s word made all the difference. Suddenly lines go tight. They strain to pull nets full to bursting over the side of the boat. They wave frantically for their **partners in the other boat** to come help.

Disciples crawl over flopping fish trying to bring their now tippy overloaded boats to shore without sinking. These seasoned fishermen had never seen anything like it: **Peter and all those with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught.**

Of course, this all makes it clear it was actually Jesus who made the catch. The disciples just got to hold the net.

Now Jesus did not display His power as true God to revolutionize the fishing industry on the lake. He did it to prepare and encourage the disciples for their new

work: **Jesus said...From now on you will be catching people.**

Instead of casting a net that kills fish, they would cast the gospel net of God's Word, that catches people out of spiritual death and into eternal life with God.

But this was a daunting task. A handful of disciples tasked with carrying the message of Jesus out to the world... to Jews steeped in works righteousness, to Gentiles with all their false gods and pagan philosophies. Both would oppose their message.

And what were they to use? **Go and make disciples... baptizing and teaching...** words spoken by human beings, words on page of Scripture, a handful of water and more words.

How is *that* ever going to work? From a human point of view, that seems as likely to succeed as fishing in Galilee's **deep water** in the noon day sun.

And then, there's the fishermen themselves... **When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord."**

This miracle made Peter deeply aware that He a **sinful** human being was standing before the Holy One of God. Surely Jesus who saw fish in the deeps of sea could see Peter's heart with all its faults and flaws. Like Samson's parents in our first lesson, Peter trembled to be in the presence of God, recognizing the imperfect has no right to stand before the pure and holy.

Notice Jesus doesn't tell Peter he's wrong. Peter is right about himself, he is **sinful**, just as you and I are **sinful men, women and children** with imperfect hearts and lives that don't match up to the sinless obedience God requires.

Yes, God the Son, Jesus Christ agrees that we are **sinful**. And it would make perfect sense for God to turn His back on us and leave us to the hell every sin deserves.

But wonder of wonders, Jesus does *not* go away! Instead He speaks a word of forgiveness: **Have no fear.**

And remember! Jesus' word makes all the difference. Jesus speaks and empty nets are filled with fish!

Jesus speaks a word and our sins are gone, forgiven, forgotten, washed clean... or as the Bible book of Micah puts it: **God... you... pardon sin and forgive transgression... you... delight to show mercy... you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.**

Because Jesus *does not* go away from us, but gave his life on the cross to pay for our sins, it's as though He's taken off us every sin, every wrong, every fault and failing, sunk them to the bottom of the ocean and posted a no-fishing sign.

Jesus who defeated death itself says you are forgiven. Through His Word the Bible, in the promise of Baptism and with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper, Jesus tells you: **"Have no fear... you are forgiven, you will live with me in heaven!"**

See what a difference Jesus' word makes! And Just as He said, Jesus would send these disciples out to **catch people.** They went with Jesus' word, and so **there would be a catch.**

And was there ever! 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, Peter and the Apostles cast the gospel net out

on the day of Pentecost and three thousand people were baptized. Why? Because Jesus said so!

Of course, again it was Jesus who made the catch. The disciples just got to hold the net.

Sermons and teaching, words spoken by a weak and frail human being, the Words of the Bible on paper, a bite of bread and sip of wine in the Lord's Supper, a few drops of water and words in Baptism--it may not look impressive to human eyes. But it is Jesus' Word and Jesus' Word makes all the difference.

Because Jesus says so **there will be a catch!** Hearts still tremble before as His law reveals their sin and then are filled with comfort by His promise in Bible, Baptism and Communion: **Have no fear.**

Yes, Jesus still makes the **catch**, and He even lets us get to hold the net!

Even if you are not a full time called worker—pastor, teacher or missionary or even a part time called worker like an elder or Sunday School teacher, yet Jesus has made you a part of His church of believers with the task of **catching people** as we work to bring His Word to others.

Jesus has made us all His witnesses, to use our words and actions, our prayers and support of gospel work to cast the net of His word in our homes, our community and out to the world.

Just like it was for the first disciples it is not easy. It is hard work and often takes a battle against our sinful nature with all its fears, doubts and mixed up priorities. The world is just as hostile to God's Word. We may think, "But I don't have the gifts, I don't have the skills to speak to that friend."

But remember what we've seen! None of that matters. All that matters is Jesus' word. The catch doesn't depend on our abilities, our worthiness, our skills. It all depends on Jesus' Word. His Word still makes all the difference.

And so **there will be a catch!** Why? Because Jesus' says so. He tells us: **My word...will not return to me empty.**

So *keep on fishing*. Invite that friend to worship or Bible study, pray for courage to carefully speak of Jesus' love for you, pray for mission work, for the work of pastors and teachers. Hear and study the word to be equipped and encouraged. Talk to your children about

Jesus, bring them to Sunday school. Participate in the work of our congregation's ministries.

Though right now you can't now see all the results Jesus will bring, yet the day will come when you get to see "the nets full to bursting" as God's believing people rejoice forever on heaven's golden shore. Why? Because Jesus says **there will be a catch.** Amen.

The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. Amen.