

## **Luke 5:1-11**

### **Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Title: “Letting Down the Nets”**

**Vicar Michael Larson**

Now, Simon and the other disciples probably had the best fishing equipment available in all of Galilee. Simon probably had the best and shiniest hooks available. He had the best quality fishing line and the finest wooden rods. His fishing nets were no doubt, top of the line. His rope was strong and tight, capable of holding the greatest of catches. Besides having the proper equipment, Simon was ambitious and motivated. He had the true fisherman smarts – he had credibility. He had been working away all through the night hovering over the waters – like a skilled hunter – testing those waters – planning for the big catch. He was casting his nets into the deeps from his sturdy wooden boat – dimly lit by the Galilean moon.

In the light of the morning sun, Jesus preaches to the crowds along the shores, and asks that professional fisher to start fishing, “Simon...Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon of course knew better, “But Master, we toiled all night and took nothing...no fish at all.” Simon knew his chances. He had already did what he knew how to do. His own nets had come up short.

Yet, Simon in the second part of his response to Jesus says something incredibly profound, “But at your word Jesus I will let down the nets.” When those nets are lowered – when they are knitted and knotted by the Words of Jesus, and cast into the deeps that is what changes everything. The nets become filled with fish to their breaking point and fill the boats until they are on the verge of sinking.

Here, Jesus is teaching his future disciples a thing or two about being fishers of men. And it doesn't have anything to do with a technique or a technology. He does not have a flashy bait or a shiny hook that catches us or lures us in.

It is not a special tactic. It has nothing to do with skill, experience, or knowledge. Our Lord does not provide a fresh and alluring program to rope us in. Nor does he provide a progressive church growth model.

Jesus simply gives Simon His Word to lower the net. Just throw it out there! Throw out my net Simon and speak my Word. And Simon – later to be Peter the rock – and future denier of Christ – steps into that preaching office and hurls that Word of promise into the deeps.

This is how God builds His church, by becoming flesh and casting himself upon us – and bringing us to that cross. He makes us Christians. That Gospel laden net. That net knitted and

knotted with that Word of God. When our Lord gathers His church he does not go from person to person asking whether they have made him ‘the center of their lives.’

He just takes us and lowers down his Word upon us. He just gives that Word to us to boldly speak. And this is a Word that capture and creates. God does not deal with us outside of the lowering of His Divine Word to his people. He just lets it fly, He throws it out there.

And nothing pleases God more than netting and trapping sinners. That is why he came. And poor Simon-Peter is trapped in the net. At that miracle of the catch he realizes that he is standing before the Holy One of Israel – the Lord of all creation. He gets down on his knees in desperation for he knows no one can stand before God and live. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." As every Jew knew, anyone who stands before the Lord dies. He is trapped in the net and afraid. He is exposed as a sinner. He cannot run or hide. And no sin can live in the presence of God.

But our Lord throws his net around us and pulls us into his boat – that is into his precious church. He descends into the depths – descends into hell itself - not to condemn us, but to catch us. To catch us and release us into that freedom that He brings. He descends to forgive us. He becomes that sin bearer, diving into the deeps of our sin, into those mucky deeps – those secret things and those secret places that we try to hide from the world. He knows Simon Peter’s secret sins. He knows his lack of trust in the heavenly Father. He knows Simon Peter’s shady business dealings at the fish market. He knows his pride and vanity. He sees Simon Peter’s sinister denial of him in the court yard of the high priest.

*And he knows our pride and mistrust too. He knows our shady dealings. He knows our gossiping lips. He sees our nervousness and our obsessive worrying. He sees us not trusting in our heavenly father.*

Simon cries out “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” But Jesus does not depart. He refuses. He takes on Peter’s sins head on. He dives into those dark murky deeps and makes those sins his very own. He dives into our murky places, our dark secret sins, claiming them as his own.

He takes those sins of ours and casts them upon himself. Those dark murky sins are put on the cross and nailed to death. Those sins are no longer yours. But another, God himself, has claimed them as His. And in His bitter suffering and death those sins are buried in the deepest depths. And they will never rise again.

When Jesus, that fisher of men, lowers his net He takes all. He takes everything for himself. He does not ask you if you’ve made a decision for Jesus. He does not give you an argument about why believing in him will give you a better, happier life. He just grabs you and does not leave you to fend for yourself. He throws you in holy baptism and holy living, and keeps you by his side.

We stand before him as sinners, but he has dressed us up in a white robe or righteousness. He sees us as those whom he has gathered with his own hands and renewed in His waters of life and in His Word. Those dark murky waters that had once surrounded us have been washed away by his blood. How beautiful and lovely is His church.

Those of us, once lost and floundering in the deeps, have been raised up to live before God in innocence and blessedness – in the freedom and light of the gospel. We breathe in that pure air in which we have the breath of life. We have been captured by God's love and brought ashore. There is nothing to be afraid of. When we hear and see the Holy one of God and stand before Him, there is nothing about us that he does not love. He delights in us whom he has caught by lowering His Word of promise. Do not be afraid. He loves you without measure. And He has traveled to the lowest depths to claim you as his own. In the name of Jesus. Amen.