**Fishing Or Angling?**

**Luke 5:1-11**

Our text for this morning is the Gospel lesson from St. Luke read earlier.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I am guessing that most of you here know that I love fishing! I am in good Biblical company, for many of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen. Fishing is a part of our text today, and that is exactly what I’d like to examine.

Like I said, I fancy myself a fisherman. Ask Pauline, and she’d probably say there are times I am obsessed with fishing. She would also probably say that I have more fishing gear than one person needs – different poles, different reels, different tackle boxes, and all of them ***full*** of different things. And she might then add, “With all the stuff he already has, I do not understand why he cannot drive past a Cabela’s or a Fleet Farm without stopping and thinking that he somehow needs more.”

But, she doesn’t understand. There are different kinds of fish, and each kind of fish needs different kind of gear. You cannot fish for musky with a rod and reel set up to catch bluegill. And, you certainly will not catch any perch on the lures you use for musky. While rods, reels, and lures ***MAY*** be used for multiple species of fish, usually that does not work..

But, is what I love to do, fishing? Let’s look at our text. After preaching from Simon’s boat, so that He could talk to a larger crowd, Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

As a sport fisherman I can only use a net is to catch bait fish, and bait fish are truly just a live lure to entice fish to bite. Nets, however, are allowed if you are a commercial fisherman. So, am I really a fisherman?

According to Mr. Webster, a fisherman is one who fishes for sport or for a living. I fish for sport, but is fisherman the best name for me? Again, I consulted Mr. Webster about another term, angler. 1. An angler is a fisherman who uses hook and line. 2. A person who schemes and uses tricks to get something.

The sport I enjoy is angling. Deceiving fish to bite on a hook – which leads ultimately to their death and my supper. I need all that gear so when one gimmick doesn’t attract a fish to bite the hook at the end of my line, I try something else. Anglers tries different means to fool fish into biting on their hook. Sometimes fish will even spit the hook that enticed them to bite, once they discover the real truth behind the lure or bait that seduced them.

In our text, Jesus is out in a boat with Simon. After Jesus tells him to put down the nets, a miracle happens. *And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking.*

Peter is amazed. He calls the other boat to come out and help. There were so many fish both nets were close to breaking. All of them were astonished. Simon seeing all this, falls to his knees at Jesus’ feet and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Jesus’ response is, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Or, as it says in Matthew and Mark, “I will make you fishers of men.”

Yes, this text teaches evangelism. Jesus gives evidence of His divinity, calls sinners forth to be His servants, and informs them that they will catch men, they will be ministers of the gospel.

What technique will they use to catch men? Do they swing by Cabela’s to stock up on the latest and greatest lures, gitzits and such? Do they look for the best technique guaranteed to work and bring them into their congregation?

When it comes to evangelism, are we to be anglers, enticing people to join our particular congregation? Are we to use different gimmicks and techniques to lure different types of people into our particular congregation? Or are we to be fishermen? Is there even a difference?

Many congregations are enamored with the latest gimmicks and tricks which others have guaranteed will grow their congregation. I could go to a bookstore and find hundreds of books that promise to grow our congregation. (Want to put Pauline over the edge, ask her if she thinks I need to buy more books.) But all these books have one thing in common, the techniques they push are nothing more than angling. They claim that you need the right lures to entice people to bite – to join your congregation. And if one trick does not work, maybe another will. It is why there are pastors and congregations with comprehensive tackle boxes full of all sorts of lures to attract people to their congregations.

What does Jesus teach about evangelism? What’s involved in the great catch today? Boats and nets.

Let us look at the boat first. Jesus sees the boats. He gets into one of the boats. He teaches the people from the boat. Then, the boats are filled with the great catch of fish. In this text, it is in a boat where Jesus proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. It is a boat in which the great catch of fish is received.

It was in a boat that Noah and his whole family were saved. Moses was put in a little boat in order to save his life.

Look up at the ceiling and the shape of this nave (nave is the term for the part of the church building where we gather for services). If you were to turn this building upside down, it is much like a boat. Interestingly, the word nave is a Latin term, and it means ship or boat. Our navy has to do with boats

Christ is present in the boat in our text, and that boat is nothing more than a symbol of The Church. It is in The Church where Christ’s teaching and miracles take place. It is into Christ’s Church that believers are gathered. Christ’s Church is more than just this congregation though. Christ’s Church is not a building, it is the body of believers. The Church is all those who, in every age, trust the promises of God in Christ Jesus. It is made up of believers from Adam through the future.

Anglers want people to join their congregation, they lure them to join so that their membership grow, the bills get paid, and the doors can stay open. Just as fish often spit the hook, so people may learn that which enticed them to join a congregation is not true – they also spit the hook.

It is interesting that the nets which could catch no fish earlier, now, at the Word of Christ, catch an overabundance of fish – a miraculous amount of fish. This miraculous catch is testimony of God’s presence, and the power of His Word.

Jesus performs this great miracle in a boat with a net. It is a lesson to all His disciples. It was a lesson to those present in the boats that day in our text, and it is also a lesson to us, His 21st Century disciples. Jesus commissions His disciples to catch men. How? By angling? Does He instruct them to look to the world of 21st Century marketing for the techniques by which His church will be filled?

Christ does not tell the disciples to dig through their tackle boxes of fancy lures to bring the people in. He simply instructs, “Go out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch.” Simply cast out the net of God’s Word. With one net, the simple proclamation of the Word of Christ, two boats were filled to the point of sinking. Christ is showing in this miracle the comfort of the preached Word. You and I are to proclaim the Word, just as Christ instructs. As we take the message of Christ to our world, that Word will indeed gather many into Christ’s church. It will do so, not by trick or gimmick or lure, but because God is at work in His Word. We are simply to cast out the net out.

Christ will gather those whom He calls to Himself. He will fill His Church. And He uses means that seem uncertain to us. He uses His Word. He uses sinners to speak that Word to others. Yet He promises that Word will not return to Him empty but accomplish the purpose for which He sent it.

Too many do not trust that Word. Instead, they resort to lures and techniques while the net hangs on the wall, all but abandoned – just like so many Bibles sit on shelves gathering dust. Some will speak about what a wonderful thing the Word of God is, but do not trust that it does anything.

Martin Luther concluded one of his sermons on this text with these words.

And as the net suffers through being let down into the water and becomes wet, so must the office of preaching suffer through all sorts of trials and persecution in the world, even to the extent of being rent and torn. I cannot produce profitable or fruitful results in all men; yet great power and much fruit are found in those who remain steadfast and are kept to the end. It is our comfort, however, that Christ, through our preaching, will lead his own into His boat and keep them there, although we know that we cannot make devout men of all to whom we preach, and that we cannot escape persecution on account of our office; yea, though we know that many will fall away even among those of whom we felt sure that we had them in the net. (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. IV, Fifth Sunday after Trinity, pp. 165-166)

Dear friends, although Peter had toiled and toiled all night without a catch, the catch was miraculous. God’s Word produced a catch. So, it is with the preaching of God’s Word. Being a fisherman is tiring, grueling work. There are times that is seems pointless, no fish are caught. So also, it is fishing for men.

Do we want a boat full of fish – do we want people to hear the Gospel and believe in Christ unto life everlasting? Or, are we angling for people to join our congregation? We see our struggling congregation and think it is a fight for survival! We are enticed to try new things, to offer gimmicks that are appealing to draw people in and keep our congregation going. We need to repent for our lack of faith and trust of God.

It is only the very Word of Christ which can draw men into the safety and security of His boat, the church. Only the Holy Spirit makes true believers through the means God has ordained – Christ the Word of God incarnate.

You are to be in the Word – where it i is taught and truth and purity, and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the command of Christ. In the Word, secure in the boat, you are always prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope that is in you. You are to be in the Word so that you might proclaim Christ to others – you need to be in the boat in order to cast out the net.

Peter recognizes His unworthiness before Christ, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Christ’s response is, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.”

Peter, you are in the boat. You are a member of my Church. Your sin is forgiven!

Further, Peter is informed that Christ intends to use him to bring that same word of comfort Christ gives him – to others.

You may not feel a fit to be a fisher of men – you are not.

I am not fit to be a fisherman!

Called to something we do not feel fit to be doing, or adequately prepared to be doing, we may desire to use other things than simply the tool He gives us – more than just a net. We may not trust the Word of God to do its task, that it needs something more glamorous and alluring. We may believe that in our hands, the net of God’s Word simply seems inadequate, not because of the net, but because we are the ones handling the net.

You are forgiven for such sinful thoughts. You are fed and nourished to handle the net. It may seem clumsy to you, but simply throw it out. Christ promises that through us, His Word will work wonders – not on account of us, but because of the miraculous nature of the Word of Christ.

Christ forgives your lack of faith. He has brought you into His boat, His church. He has made you His own through His Word. Now, in His boat, Christ invites you to go fishing, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.” And with God nothing is impossible. In the name of Jesus. Amen.