

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

¹On 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.

I will admit it – I don't know much about fishing! Nor have I ever had much patience for it in the past. I wish I did – I know many folks that find respite and relaxation on the side of the lake, or in the boat, for long enough, you MIGHT catch a fish or two. I've talked to many of you that have had success, and not so much success, in fishing in streams and lakes, but having a good time in the pursuit. But, for me, after all, I come from the land of the Great Lakes (not the Iowa Great Lakes, but the REAL Great

Lakes), and sojourned for 14 years in the land of 10,000 lakes! I have heard some of these “fish stories”, as well as tips for fishing better. I’ve heard that often, folks will go out for a day, and catch nothing at all! It’s kind of like watching a scoreless tie in hockey or baseball – I begin to wonder if it was just a waste of time, to spend hours watching a competition, only to have nobody win! Much better to have a game like football or basketball, where at least there is almost a guarantee to have someone score a goal. Like I said, I don’t have much in the way of patience. I’ve gotten better over the years, but it’s still a problem for me. That makes it harder for me to relate to this narrative from St. Luke’s Gospel, which is why it took me a while to get it. There’s much more going on here than meets the eye; there are connections that we need to make to understand just what Jesus is doing.

Jesus specializes in doing things that we, in our sinful human natures, don’t completely understand. Just like a magician, we want to know the ins and outs, the behind the scenes nuts and bolts of what He does and how He does it. We don’t get that in our text, but we do get the amazement, the disbelief of the disciples. They knew all about fishing; they’d been out all night, and caught nothing. What did Jesus think, that suddenly there would be fish in the same place that didn’t have it before? They forgot about the fact that as Lord and God of all creation, He made the fish out of nothing; therefore, He had power over them. He could make them appear just as much as He made light where there was previously nothing but darkness.

There’s another thing that Jesus illustrates here that bears further study – His promise that they will no longer catch fish, but will catch men. Not that men will be brought into the fellowship of the church involuntarily, such as arresting them and forcing them to come. But, in the same way that Jesus caused the fish to jump into the nets where they previously wouldn’t do so, so He will instill and strengthen faith in men to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and want to hear more about the news that changes everything. It’s the Holy Spirit that moves in the heart to create and sustain faith; we are merely His instruments, His obedient hands and feet and mouths. God was going to do miracles through

the ministrations of the first disciples, and continues to do great things in the church today. Even though we might not see them firsthand, that doesn't mean they aren't happening – they might just be happening in another part of the world from where we live. God is powerful; His Word is true; He's more than just a miracle worker, He's the God of all creation. Let's delve into this "fish story" a little bit more, and see what we are supposed to profit from it today.

There must have been a previous interaction between Jesus and James and John and Peter before that day – otherwise they would probably not have left everything and followed Him. This version in St. Luke's Gospel is a little bit different than that of St. Matthew and St. Mark – Luke is the only one that includes the great catch of fish in the calling of Jesus' first disciples. This probably fits with Luke's promise to provide an "orderly account" of the life and ministry of Jesus – Luke includes some details that Matthew and Mark don't include, for example. However, all three accounts presume that there has been some interaction between Jesus and the disciples before He called them to follow Him. This might have not been included in the Gospel writings. It might even have been in a supernatural way, like the way in which Jesus appeared to Paul on the Road to Damascus. But, we are told that Jesus called, they didn't question, but even followed Him. In Mark's Gospel, we're told that Simon and Andrew, who were brothers, even left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the nets, and followed Jesus without hesitation. They serve as examples of not hesitating, but putting the service of God in His kingdom over and above any other alliances and responsibilities that they might have

Are we called to make such a dramatic sacrifice? Maybe or maybe not! We're called to serve God in whatever vocation we find ourselves – you don't have to go into full time church work to serve God; perhaps it's easier to reach out to people without the baggage of being from the church. Don't get me wrong – we desperately need pastors, teachers and deaconesses in the church. But, we aren't all called to do this, and that's okay! The important point is that we can all give a reason for the hope that

lies within us, why we are different than others in our hope for the future because of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, and the promises that come to us because of Him.

But even then, there was a similar reaction to Jesus being in their midst than the others that saw angels had – they were afraid. Peter had just seen Jesus multiply the catch of fish so much that they nearly tore their nets – this was an awe-inspiring feat, one only possible with God. The shepherds, and Mary, and Joseph, and Zechariah – they saw angels of God, which were even less powerful than Jesus Himself, and their first concern was that they were going to die – that’s how powerful the angels, not to mention Jesus, is. Peter’s reaction – “get away from me, because I’m a sinful man” – he was conscious of this immediately upon the manifestation of Jesus. We’d all have the same reaction – we are knowledgeable about our sinfulness. The only cure for this separation between us and God is for Him to do something about it. Rather than hiding His face in the cleft of the rock, as He did with Moses, God hid Himself under the form of a human being, so that they could stand to be in His presence, and not be destroyed

What can we glean from this today? Even those things that we think are impossible with man are possible with God. Converting the heart of stone from unbelief to faith in Jesus as the one and only Savior is only possible with the work of God. Having God care so much for us that He does everything for our salvation, including sacrificing Himself, is something that’s so miraculous that we can’t believe it would really happen

What were the crowds doing at the time? They were pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, there were times that He had to take a break, so that the crowds didn’t crush Him. That’s how He ended up teaching the crowds from a boat, rather than on the land. That’s how He ended up in the Garden of Gethsemane, to have time for prayer, immediately before His Passion, death, and resurrection. These were the same folks that were described earlier as “sheep without a shepherd” – He taught them the Word as one with authority, rather than the religious

leaders, who often weren't sure just what the Word of God had to say. They had been moved by the Holy Spirit to LISTEN to Him, just like they were told to do at His Baptism, and like the disciples in the inner circle would be re-told at His Transfiguration. After all, where else would they go? He had the words of eternal life, as Peter would so eloquently put it later on. He went into the boat, and put out from shore, so that He could move on to His visual aid, about Jesus' power. So that they would listen to Him more, and so that He could prove His power, and so that people would believe that He was and is the Son of God, He used the easily accessible power of His Word to cause the amazing catch of fish. He did this not to scare people, but to make it so that they would believe in Him.

It's no mistake that we call the church proper the "nave", or the main body of a boat. That's why there's such a peak at the top of most churches, and many appear to be plain wood – not only for acoustics, but also to look like the bottom of a ship. Imagine if you will the entire church turned 180 degrees – the keel of the ship, the angled hull, plowing through the waters, being the ceiling over our heads. The boat is the church, both in church architecture and in the narrative concerning Jesus. The only way into the boat is the Word of God, or being caught alive, passively captured, ensnared, in the net. It's wonderful for us to be concerned about the earthly needs of our brother in need – whether he is clothed or fed or has what he needs to support his body and life. These are not wrong things for the church to be involved with, and those in the church that are doing these things should be commended. However, the disciples couldn't "love" the people into the boat with a coat or a hot meal. The true net, that brings folks into the boat, is the Word of God. The Word is powerful; the Word doesn't need any help, especially from us! We don't need to make our speaking the Word more persuasive; we definitely don't need to "spruce up" the Scriptures! If we're meeting physical needs of folks, it needs to be for the purpose of ultimately making them receptive to the Word of God. We can use humanitarian efforts to build a relationship with people; to be shown that the church cares about more than just the world to come, but also the struggles of this life here on earth. But, if we stop with just helping the poor and

needy, we're missing something. It's not the earthly gifts that we bring to people that change their lives, and bring them into the safety of the boat as it traverses choppy waters. Rather, it's the Word of God that is living and active, that converts the heart and brings eternal life to the soul. Along with the Word of God, it's also about the use of, and belief in, the Sacraments, the Word with wheels and legs. Baptism causes the forgiveness of sins to be brought to us today, and the Lord's Supper brings us the fruits of that once-for-all sacrifice in His Body and His Blood. There's nothing we can do to improve on the Word of God; when we try, we set ourselves up for failure.

Jesus made the efforts that the disciples put in be shown for what they were – puny (even though they fished all night) when compared to His salvation-causing love and mercy (throwing the nets back out, using the Word of God to “catch men”). All of men's strivings are like filthy rags, and the only standard that matters is the righteous standard of God's Law. One trespass against the Law of God will send us to the fires of hell. It takes Jesus' intervention, His love and mercy personified, to cause us to move from being condemned to saved, from an empty net to one that is so full that it is almost torn. God has tremendous power, and works in our lives every day. The great thing is that He has this power, but He tempers it and doesn't use all of it against us because He loves us. His love knows no bounds, and certainly is nothing like the love that we know on this earth. His love is salvific, perfect, self-sacrificing, pure and holy. That's what this miracle of Jesus means to us today – He harnesses His power for us and our salvation.

The fact remains that this retelling of what Jesus did with the filling of the nets with fish still survives in the Scriptures today. Rather than being lost to history, we still retell this narrative, because of the power of God that underpins it. As St. John retells it in his Gospel, THESE things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His Name. That's the real point of everything that Jesus did when He walked the earth – to convert sinful hearts to faith in Him and what He was about to accomplish for us. He didn't come to earth for His own

salvation, but for ours. He didn't come to forgive His own sins (of which He had none); He came to forgive each and every one of us our sins and our sinfulness.

As we continue to journey through this time of the church, this Trinity season, we're exposed to a great variety of teachings in the life and ministry of Jesus. We've just finished hearing from Jesus Himself, in parables, what exactly the kingdom of heaven is like. It's a place built on forgiveness, repentance and absolution, to solve the biggest problem that mankind has – sin. Now, He demonstrates His power in miracles, which will culminate in the greatest miracle of all – His death and resurrection for our sakes, to show us what's going to happen to us, that we will rise at the end of time, in accordance with His plan and His purpose. It's all connected, and the theme of the entire Scripture is Jesus and what He has done for all creation.

Thanks be to God for continuing to reveal Himself to us in bite-size chunks, so that we can process just what He has done and Who He is. If He revealed His entire glory to the disciples in one fell swoop, they would have been destroyed just standing there. But, because He chose to reveal His glory gradually, they (and we) are able to process it, and appreciate it, and give thanks for it. He has truly done everything for our salvation – He has chosen to use His power to save us, and not destroy us, as would rightly deserve. He goes beyond that and gives us the inheritance that is fit for the Son of God, heavenly glory, even though we don't deserve it and haven't earned it. He has done all of this for us, and all that's left for us to do is to thank and praise, serve and obey Him...and marvel at His all-surpassing love. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.