

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

There Is Power in His Word

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

What will he say? In just a few hours, Coach Sean Payton will be standing in front of his football team, ready to give the pregame speech of his life. What can he say to inspire his players to play their best football ever? The truth is: what he will say is not going to determine the outcome of the Super Bowl. The game will be decided on the field by the players. But imagine if he could... Imagine if his words not only inspired his players but actually won the game. That would be one powerful speech. No human being has the ability to speak words that powerful. But as we take a closer look at Jesus' words in our Gospel reading today, we see that the words Jesus speaks are nothing short of miraculous. Jesus' words work miracles and change lives. And so today, we must confess: *There is power in his Word.*

As we look at today's reading, we see Jesus speaking three times. Every time he speaks, something amazing happens. The first time we do not have his exact words recorded. He is preaching to a large group of people. Luke records the fact that the people were crowding around Jesus. There is a chance that they were simply interested in hearing him speak and figured the closer they got the better. More likely, the people just wanted to get a better look at Jesus. They had heard about the miracles he had worked throughout Galilee and wanted to see him up close and personal. Many people probably came less out of a sincere desire to hear the Word of God and more out of idle curiosity. Little did they realize, they were about to hear the most amazing thing they would ever have an opportunity to hear—the Word of God being proclaimed by the Son of God himself. In order to make sure that the people were able to hear him without distraction, Jesus got into Simon's boat and pushed off from shore a bit. There he sat and taught the people. And what happened when he spoke? A miracle. It wasn't something you could necessarily see. But we know that Jesus' words were changing stony hearts of unbelief to fleshy hearts of faith.

After he was finished with his preaching to the crowd, we hear him speak again. This time, his words are directed to one man alone—Simon Peter. By this time, Peter was already a student of Jesus. He had been called to follow Jesus and learn from him. He had not, however, completely given up his former occupation of fisherman. That is something that would happen on this momentous day in Peter's life. It began with Jesus telling Peter, "*Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.*" Here we have Jesus, a carpenter by trade, telling Peter, an experienced fisherman, how to fish. Of course, Jesus was no ordinary carpenter. He was the Son of God and his words were no ordinary words...they were words spoken with divine authority. Peter recognized this fact. Had some stranger told Peter to go fishing, he might have said, "No way." After all, he had just been fishing all night and hadn't caught a thing. There was no reason to believe that things would be

different in the middle of the day. But because this was the word of Jesus, Peter listened. He said, “*Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*”

And what happened when Peter followed the words of Jesus? A miracle. This wasn’t just Jesus hitting the lucky spot on the Sea of Galilee that day. This was something extraordinary. That can be witnessed by the fact that Peter had to signal to the other boat and, even with the help, he could hardly manage this tremendous catch. Peter saw the hand of God at work. And he was terrified. He quickly fell at Jesus knees and said, “*Go away from me Lord! I am a sinful man.*” If you think about it, those were some foolish words. Peter and Jesus were still in the boat in the middle of the sea. Where did he want Jesus to go? Peter was so overcome with fear that he spoke without thinking. And why this tremendous fear? Peter had just witnessed the awesome power of God. He knew he was treading on holy ground. And yet he was far from holy. He was a sinful human being. He didn’t deserve to be in the boat with Jesus. He didn’t deserve to have Jesus speak to him the way he did and work a miracle for his benefit the way he had just done. The resulting emotion was natural—sheer terror.

Have you ever felt that great a sense of unworthiness before a holy God? Have you ever stood shaking with a Bible in your hands, terrified to open the cover and read what is inside? Most likely, this is not an emotion you have experienced. One reason we might not feel that terror is our lack of respect for the awesome power of God’s Word. We see Jesus’ word bring in a miraculous catch of fish this morning. Throughout the Epiphany season, we have seen Jesus’ Word work wonders. It turned the water into wine. It healed the sick. It cast out demons. Such a powerful Word. And yet we so often treat it as something ho-hum. Just another book on the shelf. If you are lacking in respect for the power of Jesus’ Word, perhaps you should just think of the words he will speak on judgment day. On that day, his word will determine your future for all of eternity. On that day, Jesus could easily turn to you and say “Depart from me, you who are cursed.” Does that get your attention? When I think of the awesome power of God’s Word combined with my unworthiness to be in its presence, I am left with much reason to be afraid.

That is why Jesus’ words to Peter are so amazing. That is why we need to hear Jesus speak those words to us this morning as well. What is it that Jesus said to Peter? What is the great speech that Jesus gave, which would change Peter’s life forever? It was simply this: “*Don’t be afraid, from now on, you will catch men.*” Don’t be afraid. Peter seemed to have every reason to be afraid. Yet, Jesus saw the big picture. Jesus knew that the very reason he came to this earth was to remove the cause of Peter’s fear—his sin. The mouth that spoke the miracle-working words on that day would be the same mouth which would one day shout, “It is finished!” With that short phrase, “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus really summed up the entire gospel message. He had come that Peter might know forgiveness and peace. There was no reason to be afraid.

Jesus speaks the same word of peace to us. We don’t have to fear words of judgment and condemnation coming from him on the Last Day, because we already know the words he will speak to us. And they are words of peace and joy. He will say to us, “Come with me, you who are blessed, to the inheritance I have prepared for you.” We know that we will hear these words because we know that we have forgiveness in Jesus blood. We trust the Word when it says, “*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” That is why the Word is so very precious to us. It assures us that, in spite of all seeming evidence to the contrary, we don’t need to be afraid.

The second part of Jesus’ speech to Peter is equally amazing. He tells Peter, “*From now on you will catch men.*” Not only did Peter have no reason to fear, Jesus was going to use Peter to bring people into the kingdom of God by the power of his Word. Jesus could have been thinking to himself, “You’re amazed now, Peter? All you did was bring some fish into a boat. One day, you will stand before a multitude and through the power of my Word, you will catch thousands in one day!” Notice how Jesus’ words to Peter are not a command. He does not tell Peter: “Go out and catch men.” His words are a promise, “You will catch men.” It wasn’t up to Peter to do the hard work of bringing souls into the kingdom. God was going to do that. He had chosen Peter to be a tool which he would use.

We also need to hear this promise from Jesus as well. Just as his Word drives out all fear and fills us with confidence, his Word also leads us to follow him. He has given us the privilege and the opportunity to take that all powerful Word out into a dying world and watch it work. We can't know exactly how and when God will catch souls with his Word, but isn't it awesome to think that we have the privilege of participating in the process? When we think how God has given us—sinners that we are—the grace to plant his seed and watch it grow, how could we respond in any other way than giving thanks and living for him?

And what happened after Jesus spoke these words to Peter? A miracle. They left everything and followed Jesus full-time from that day forward. His Word can work just as powerfully in us. It can free us from fear and fill us with a desire to share it with others that we might witness miracles before our eyes in the changed hearts and changed lives of those around us. There certainly is power in his Word. May God open the eyes of our hearts to see this and appreciate it every day. **Amen.**

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