

Epiphany 5 / February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1

“On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.”

Jesus' words had a powerful and immediate effect upon nature and upon people. When Jesus spoke the forces of nature obeyed, instantly and completely. When Jesus spoke, people stopped and listened! His words were a magnet, by which He drew people to Himself. In the gospel of John, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice and follow me.” His words caught people's attention, opened their ears to listen and opened their hearts to believe. People wanted to hear Jesus. They came in throngs to hear Him speak. So many people crowded to hear Jesus in our gospel that He needed a boat to serve as a speaking platform. They knew in their hearts that they lived not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They knew that Jesus spoke the word of God.

When He finished talking, He asked Peter to push the boat into deeper water and let their nets down for a catch of fish. Peter wasn't too eager. He and his associates had fished all night and hauled in nothing! What did Jesus know about fishing? He was the carpenter's son, right? If anyone else had asked, he probably would have told him to shove off. But because it was Jesus' making the request, Peter let down the nets, albeit reluctantly. Immediately they felt the pull of a large shoal of fish. There were so many fish that the net was dragging the ship down. As the boat sank perilously close to the surface of the lake, the fishermen may have wondered who had caught who? At Jesus' word Peter dropped his nets. Without a word Jesus filled their nets with fish! Jesus is the Living Word of God. Good things happen when we listen to Jesus, take His words to heart and believe Him.

Peter and his companions caught a boat load of fish. Jesus caught a boat load of fishermen. They caught fish with a net, Jesus netted them with His word and hauled them into His ship, the church. They became fishers of men, children and women; netting them with the gospel and gathering them into the church through faith in Jesus and confession of His name. They went from being simple fishermen with a small commercial fishery, to being apostles of Jesus, upon whose words the Lord would build His church; against which the gates of hell would not prevail. This was the beginning of monumental changes in Peter's life and in the lives of his companions. Jesus told Peter that from that time on he would no longer catch fish with nets and hooks, the usual accessories of fishermen, but would catch human beings for the kingdom of God with Jesus' words, as the net!

Peter took Jesus' words to heart, confessed his sin and believed in his Saviour. Peter had a lot to learn about this kind of fishing, but he grew in faith through continued instruction in Jesus' words. A few years later he caught an even larger number of people for Jesus than the fish Jesus caught for him in our gospel. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached the gospel to a crowd in Jerusalem. The result was nothing short of miraculous. Luke says that on the day of Pentecost alone, more than three thousand people believed the gospel and were baptized in the name of Jesus.

Peter listened to Jesus and took His words to heart. Good things happen when we listen to Jesus and take His words to heart! When we listen to Jesus' words, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, shows us our need for salvation. When we take Jesus' words to heart, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to faith and leads us to Jesus as our Saviour, in whom we have salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. Good things happen when we take Jesus' words and share them with others. His desire is both that we would believe and share our faith with others, so that they too would be caught in the net of the gospel and be gathered into God's kingdom through faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Jesus wants us to take His words and share them with others. Jesus filled Peter's nets and boat with fish without a word, but He fills His spiritual vessel, the church, through the net of His word. In the letter to the Romans, Paul asked, “How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone telling them?” Isaiah sang, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet him who brings good news.” There is no better word than God's word and no better news than the gospel of salvation in Jesus' name. Jesus wants us to share the gospel message with the words of our mouths and by the actions of our lives. He wants us to tell others about forgiveness, life and salvation in His name.

Jesus accomplished His will with or without a word. God doesn't need a medium or means, such as the word to accomplish His will. Jesus didn't have to tell the water to become wine. It happened because He willed it. Jesus didn't have to tell the fish to swim into the net. They went there, because that's where He wanted them to go. But God has chosen to accomplish His saving purpose through the word, proclaimed by the church and spoken by the voices of believers. Paul said in the letter to the Romans, "Faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." Faith comes through God's word, spoken by us to others, spoken to us by others. Through the word, the Holy Spirit works the greatest miracle in the human heart, faith in Jesus as Saviour.

God wants us to share in the work of gathering people into His kingdom by telling others the good news of His love in Jesus. He gave Him to be the Saviour of the world. He wants us to tell the world about Him, whom He gave to be the Saviour of the world. When Jesus said, "From now on you will be catching people," He wasn't speaking only to Peter. He wants all of us to cast the net of the gospel and draw people into His kingdom. Do you feel up to the task? Peter was hesitant at first. He felt unworthy of even being in Jesus' presence. When he realized what had happened and that Jesus had made it happen, he was overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness. He said, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." The Lord wouldn't go away. He came for sinful humans, to call us through the word, to catch us in the gospel and to bring us in His kingdom in the forgiveness of His cross.

Peter felt the guilt of his sin. He fell at the feet of his Saviour. It was good that Peter saw his sin and appreciated his sinfulness. Telling Jesus to go away wasn't the best response. When you feel your sin, don't tell Jesus to go away. Ask Him to come nearer. It was good that Peter saw his sin, because then He saw Jesus as his Saviour. Seeing his sin made Him more sensitive to the guilt of others and their need for forgiveness. It made him a more effective fisher of humans. It's good for us to see our sin. It prepares us to see our Saviour. An awareness of our sinfulness makes us more sensitive to the needs of others to receive forgiveness and know Jesus as their Saviour. Jesus wants us to catch humans for His kingdom, casting the net of salvation by proclaiming the good news of His name.

Peter was one of Jesus' first catches. He has caught countless others through the ages. He continues to bring people into His fishing boat, the holy Christian Church. How did Jesus catch you? I'm betting a hook didn't descend from the sky with a bible attached! He caught us with His word shared with us by other people, whom He had already hooked with the gospel. Who was the first person who told you about Jesus? Think of some of the people who have told you the story of Jesus and His love. Think of some of the people with whom you have shared the gospel message and the ways in which you shared it.

Think of people with whom you could share your faith in Jesus. Consider how you might share the gospel message with them. Jesus wants all of us to work in His fishery, calling others to faith by telling them of His name and love. Remember His word is the power. His word has power both to open our lips to speak His name and to open the hearts of those who hear to believe. God bless us with His Holy Spirit that like Peter and his companions, we too may both believe in Jesus as our Saviour and share the gospel of salvation with others. In Jesus' Name. Amen