

**THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

Text: St. Luke 5:1-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The power of CHRIST is nowhere made more visible than in the power of His Word. It is by His Word alone that He divided the heavens and placed there the sun, the moon, and stars. It was with His Word alone that He populated the oceans with its great abundance and diversity of life. His Word alone created the dry land on which it caused plants to grow and created animals great and small to graze. It was the same solitary Word of God upon His breath that He breathed into man and made of him a living being.

It is JESUS' Word which filled the nets of Saint Peter and the other disciples with so many fish that their nets began to tear and their boats to sink. Even more importantly, it is this same Word of God which filled Peter and all the apostles with faith even as it is this very same Word that brings you here this morning into the nave of this tiny boat to hear and see JESUS.

This miracle, as are all JESUS' miracles, is a divine manifestation of the power of His Word. Therefore, know this: God is not to be found in great strong winds, nor is He to be found in earthquakes. Neither will one find Him in fire. Instead, God can and *is* to be found in the still, small voice of His Holy Word taught and proclaimed with all its power and purity, which is to say that one will not find God in heartfelt human emotions and man-centered worship or entertainment.

Neither is God to be found in worldly knowledge or wisdom. For worldly knowledge and wisdom, when applied to God, are no more than blasphemy seeking to snatch away from God knowledge about Himself—knowledge which He has not revealed to man. When applied to God, worldly knowledge and worldly wisdom are little more than man's vain attempt to pridefully exalt himself above his Creator, to deny his nature as one created by God. In short, to deify himself. When man attempts to define God using worldly knowledge and wisdom it is nothing less than a futile attempt to make *himself* a god. Indeed, it is the created attempting to recreate the Creator in man's image!

So, no, God is not to be found in human opinion, human knowledge, or worldly wisdom; God *is* to be found in the assembly of all believers and saints among whom the Gospel is purely preached and the holy Sacraments are rightly administered according to God's Word. Through these, as through divine means, God gives the HOLY SPIRIT who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear His Gospel (Articles V and VII, The Augsburg Confession). It is *through* these means, and *only in* these means, that God is to be found, because it is *only* in His

Word and Sacraments that God has promised to reveal Himself to His people and thus, it is *only* in these that one can be sure that he or she has encountered the one true God.

Therefore, it is in the preaching of JESUS CHRIST and Him crucified, dead, and buried, and the third day risen from the grave, that you have come to know God. This is so because for you to truly know God, for you to truly know the love of God and the lengths to which He has gone to save you, you must look into the blood-streaked, sweaty, bruised, swollen, and filthy dead face of JESUS, as He hangs lifeless from His Cross.

In addition, it is only through the preaching of His resurrection that one can come to know the hope given you in Baptism where you are buried with Him into His death, that just as CHRIST was raised from the dead by the glory of the FATHER, even so, you also walk with Him in newness of life. In the preaching of CHRIST'S crucifixion, death, and resurrection, you come to know that in Baptism you have passed from darkness to light, from death to life, because in Baptism you are sanctified, that is, you are made holy, having put on the righteousness of CHRIST.

Our God, the one and only true God, does not wish to be revealed in any other way and even His great miracles serve only one purpose: to point you to the CHRIST, to JESUS, that you might believe that He is the SON of God, and in believing, have life in His Name.

Therefore, JESUS stepped into the boat of a fisherman, Simon Peter by name, to demonstrate the meaning of Church and the strength and power of His Word. For the boat of our Gospel text represents the Church, the great Ark in which souls are saved. As JESUS stands in the nave of this little, insignificant, craft, He commands that it be launched into the deep, into the chaos and turmoil that is this world where lost souls are drowning in despair, suffering, and pain, sin and death, being cast about by the false promises of worldly wisdom, by Satan, and by our own sinful flesh and desires.

It is into this morass of sin that JESUS commanded that His nets, that is, the Word of God, be let down to catch sinful fish like you and me to haul them alive into the Ark of God's Church, where they are to be fed on the Word of Life which is JESUS CHRIST Himself, in His true Body, given for you, and in His true Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins and the sustaining and strengthening of your faith.

This, then, is the miracle of bringing fish into the Boat; the miracle of making sinners into saints, of making one who is unclean, clean, of making one who is unworthy, worthy to be in the holy presence of God. It is the miracle of the unmerited forgiveness of sins wrought in the all-sufficient sacrifice of CHRIST JESUS, our LORD, and our SAVIOR.

This is the message of the Cross, a message that is foolishness to the wise and unbelieving world, a world that, through its own wisdom, blasphemes the Name of God and refuses to come to know Him—a world offended by the message of the Cross and its exclusive

claims. But *“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”* and it has *“pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”*

Yet, just what is it that you are to believe, and in believing, confess? You are to believe and confess that JESUS *“is the CHRIST, the SON of the Living God,”* that JESUS, *alone*, is the only One with the *“Words of eternal life.”* You are to believe and confess that all things have been accomplished and fulfilled in CHRIST through His sinless life and His innocent suffering and death on the Cross to save you. You are to believe and confess that you cannot attain heaven by your own merit or works, but that it is by the Blood of JESUS alone that you have eternal life; that by His Blood alone, you are reconciled to God, having been made a holy and sinless member of the family of God, and an heir of all He has to give you.

All this, and more, St. Peter would soon come to know and confess, but in that one moment in time, in that one brief moment when he saw the great draught of fish and the sinking boats, his mind was consumed by only one thing—fear—fear at the knowledge that he was indeed a sinful man, and Peter knew that a sinful man cannot see God and live.

But God removes Peter’s fear with a four-word sermon: *“Do not be afraid.”* In that short, succinct, sermon, JESUS conveyed His mission and the purpose of His ministry on earth. It is as though JESUS said to Peter, and by extension, to all of us: *“Do not be afraid, for I did not come to condemn sinners, but to seek and to save the lost. I have come not to kill, but I have come to make alive that you may have life, and have it to the full. I have come to forgive you all your sins.”*

Thus, JESUS’ Words, *“Do not be afraid,”* are Words of divine peace because they are JESUS’ Words of absolution, and because they are the Words of JESUS’ absolution, they are the Words of eternal life. For where there is the forgiveness of sin there is eternal life. These sweet Words deliver to the poor sinner all the compassion and love of God because they deliver to the poor sinner all the love that is God, who is, in His very nature Love. These wonderful words deliver His divine forgiveness.

Therefore, you no longer need to wrap your face in a cloak; you no longer need to avert your gaze in the presence of God. No longer will you look upon God and die. For the CHRIST has come, born from the womb of a virgin, sanctifying our flesh and making it His home. The veil of the temple is now torn asunder from top to bottom, all separation between God and man is now removed, and God is revealed in the flesh of men. For JESUS is the very Icon of God; He is the living Image of the living God; the Image of His FATHER and ours, and *“In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”*

This same JESUS is here with you this very morning, even as He has said, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age,”* and *“Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I am there in the midst of them.”* The same MESSIAH who lived and died for you, who

satisfied every jot and tittle of the Law of God for you, who suffered the fiery wrath of our FATHER in heaven because you could not, who overcame death, sin, and the devil for you through His bloody sacrificial death and His triumphant resurrection from the grave, is the very same JESUS who pronounces the forgiveness of your sins, who baptized you and your children, who feeds you the Bread of Heaven with His own Body and Blood; He is the same CHRIST who says to you *“Do not be afraid.”*

Therefore, know this—JESUS has navigated His Boat, His Ark, His Church, into the dark waters of the deep for one purpose alone—to save you. He has cast the Net of His Word into the madness, the turmoil, and the chaos of this world that you be pulled into the safety and light of His Church. He has made His pastors to be fishers of men in order to rescue you from all that would seek to destroy you.

JESUS has let down His nets to draw you to Himself with the Words, *“take, eat, this is My Body given for you... take, drink, this Cup is the New Testament in My Blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”* Our LORD wants you to know that these Words are *“[for] you and [for] your children, and [for] all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”*

In that little boat, JESUS forgave Peter’s sins and replaced his fear with courage and faith with the Words, *“Do not be afraid.”* With those Words, Peter was given the courage to forsake all and follow Him. Today, even this very morning, JESUS has conveyed to you the very same benediction with the Words, *“Do not be afraid, for I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II  
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Crestview, Florida  
6/12/30 A✠D