

11th Sunday after Pentecost August 21, 2022

A WORD FROM THE MASTER

Luke 5:1-11

Scripture Readings

1 Peter 1:13-25

Matthew 6:19-34

Hymns

1, 294, 296, 283

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ *In the Name of Jesus Christ* +

So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So 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. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

Dearly Beloved Fellow Believers,

In the Old Testament we are told how Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, came to Elisha the prophet to be healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5). When Naaman arrived Elisha did not even come out of his house to meet him but sent a servant with a set of simple directions. Naaman was to go to the Jordan River and there wash himself seven times.

High-ranking official that he was, Naaman was at first insulted by Elisha's conduct and seemingly foolish directions. He went away in a rage. But Naaman's servants were wiser. What the prophet had told him to do was simple and easy, so why not do it? After all, if the prophet had told him to do something really hard—say, to climb a high mountain—Naaman probably would have done it.

The Syrian commander decided that they had a point. Naaman went to the Jordan and washed seven times in its waters. His diseased and wasted flesh was restored so that it was like that of a child! And he knew the source of the healing power. He returned to Elisha, exclaiming, "***Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.***" (2 Kings 5:15) God's word to Naaman at first seemed powerless, even foolish. Yet when he followed that word, he found it to be divine wisdom and power.

In our text we have an example of a word from Christ that at first seemed unwise but which was shown to be divine wisdom. By this example Christ teaches us to follow His word at all times and in all situations, remembering that it is always divine wisdom.

A WORD FROM THE MASTER

To us it may sometimes seem unworkable.

The incident recorded here took place early in Jesus' ministry. It tells us the circumstances under which Peter, James, and John "***forsook all and followed Him.***" It was upon seeing and experiencing the miracle of the catch of fish that they began their life as apostles of Christ. From that day

on they walked with Jesus; they were His students and constant companions. They were being prepared to be witnesses to the world of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Yet it is clear that they were already disciples of Jesus before this. We see that from the way that Peter addresses Jesus here. He calls Him Master, a title of respect that recognizes Jesus' authority. He had the right to command and to expect that His commands would be obeyed. Peter, James, and John had already come to the conviction that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Savior. But here they were still working at their occupation of fishermen. The boat from which Jesus did His teaching here belonged to Peter. He and his partners were nearby, washing their nets after an entire night of fishing.

That night of fishing had been a disappointment; they had caught nothing, Peter says. Now we don't know how often before this they had had the experience of catching nothing at all, but we get the impression that it was unusual. Surely there were nights of fishing that were less successful than others, but to catch nothing at all—that must have been kind of strange. No doubt that night of seemingly useless activity was as much the work of Jesus as the miraculous catch that followed it. The Lord is the one who gives the increase, but He is also the one who sometimes withholds it for our good.

Jesus first asked to borrow Peter's boat. He had Peter put the boat out a little from the land; and then He sat down and proceeded to teach the multitudes that had been crowding in on Him *“to hear the word of God.”* The request to use Peter's boat as a pulpit might have been something new and unexpected for the disciples, but it was surely nowhere near as surprising as the command that followed: *“Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”* Notice that this wasn't a suggestion from Jesus. It was a command; this was something that Peter, James, and John needed to do. And it was a command that Peter wouldn't have obeyed, had it come from anyone other than Jesus. Peter was an experienced fisherman; that was how he made his living. He was

competent to decide when to go out on the lake to fish and when not to. And the command to go out at this time was clearly contrary to Peter's experience, as he says. But Peter would go out on the lake and let down the nets for one reason only: the one telling him to do so was Jesus. He was the Master, and if He said to do that, then that is what Peter would do.

Words from the Master may often seem strange and unworkable to us, just as the one in our text was to Peter. Consider just a couple of examples.

Jesus says, “***Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness***” (Matt. 6:33). As believers we surely know that it is right and necessary to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The command to do that doesn't seem strange to us. But that we should seek these things ahead of everything else—that may seem not only strange but at times completely unworkable. “*Why, if I go after those things first, I won't get very far in life; I won't make very much money; I won't have the things that I need,*” we may think. But Jesus says, “***Seek first...***” He says this to us just as He said to Peter, “***Launch out into the deep...***” It's a word from the Master; it is divine wisdom. To seek His kingdom and righteousness above and before other things is an act of faith and trust in Him. It is to recognize that He is the source of all good things in our life. It is to recognize that His kingdom and righteousness are the greatest of His gifts. It does work to seek those things first, for the Lord is true to His promise to provide for us everything else that we need.

Jesus also says that those who want to follow Him must deny themselves and take up the cross. There it sounds like Jesus is telling us to do something that is not only hard but contrary to our interests. Our natural inclination is to pursue the desires of our “self” and the interests of our “self.” And this is the way of life that is encouraged especially in our day. Yet the command to deny “self” and take up the cross is a word from the Master. And though it is not the easy way it is the right way, for Jesus knows that spending our lives pursuing the desires and interests of self

ends in death, while following Christ and possessing His kingdom and righteousness means eternal life.

Yet it is always divine wisdom.

Consider the outcome when Peter did what Jesus said, even when what He said to do didn't seem to be practical or beneficial. When Peter did what Jesus said he caught a great number of fish, so many that the net couldn't hold them and began to tear. He had to call for help from a nearby boat. The catch was so great that it filled both boats to the point that they began to sink.

The command from Jesus proved to be entirely practical and workable. It was so because it was a word from the Master. A command from Jesus can be followed with complete confidence because it is a word from the Son of God. It is a word from Him who in the beginning brought the universe into being by the power of His word. A word from Jesus is a word from Him who “*spoke and it was done,*” who “*commanded and it stood fast.*” (Psalm 33:9)

Peter understood this; he fell down at Jesus' knees and said, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*” He was overwhelmed with the realization that He was in the presence of the eternal Son of God. He was frightened by the realization that he a sinner was in the presence of the holy, sinless Son of God. But Jesus responded, “*Don't be afraid.*” Jesus hadn't come into Peter's life to condemn him for his sins; He had come to die for Peter, to save him from his sins. His intent that day was to call Peter to a new chapter in his life: to be the Lord's apostle, to catch men rather than fish. And the great catch of fish that day was a sign of how abundantly the Lord would bless Peter's life and work as an apostle.

We, too, will find Jesus' commands to be divine wisdom as we do them. He who loved us and laid down His life for us, also has the wisdom to know what is best for us. He has the power to make His commands work for our good. When we take Jesus at His word and put God first in our life, we see the wisdom and power of Jesus' command just as powerfully

as Peter saw it when the Lord gave Him so many fish that he couldn't handle them. When we take up the cross and make sacrifices for Jesus we will see more clearly the vanity and futility of this passing world; we will see that to lose our life for Jesus' sake is to find life and keep it forever. Amen.

—**Pastor Em. John Klatt**

Watertown, SD