

The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
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Luke 5:1-11

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*“And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”*

To follow Jesus is to be a disciple, a Christian. Today our Lord teaches us what it means to be a disciple. Specifically, He teaches us about His Word, and how His Word is rightly received by His disciples. It is this theme of the Word of Christ as received by the disciples of Christ that ties together today's Gospel.

By the end of this account, we see Simon Peter and James and John leaving their boats and following Jesus as the first of the Twelve disciples.

But before they left their boats, before they hauled in that miraculous catch of fish, before any of those three are even introduced to us, we first see a “crowd... pressing in on Jesus to hear the word of God,” Luke tells us. And in that, we have our first lesson for Christ's disciples. Because if it's true for this crowd, it's certainly true for all who identify themselves as Christians, followers of Christ, disciples of Christ (in the broad sense of the term). For a “disciple” is nothing other than one who places himself at the feet of a teacher, to listen, and to learn... and only then and thus to follow.

*“On one occasion, a crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the word of God.”* Does that accurately describe your discipleship—your life with Christ? Do you “press in” to hear the word of God, as He has given His Word in the Bible, and as He provides for the ongoing proclamation of that Word in the preaching and teaching of His Church? Do you “press in” to hear the Word of God every Lord's day as the people of God gather in His presence? Do you not merely “put in your time,” listening thoughtlessly.... But rather do you “press in,” listening with ears attuned? Questioning. Searching. Examining. Applying, because you want to be in Christ's presence hearing what He has to say? Not just weekly, on the Lord's Day, but daily, in the peace and quiet of your own personal reading of God's Word at home. Do you “press in” on Jesus in that way to hear the Word of God? The crowd did. And our Lord makes it abundantly clear throughout the Holy Scriptures that this is certainly God's will for His disciples also... all His disciples... that we “fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” Daily! Continually!

So the crowd was “pressing in” on Jesus to hear his Word. And suddenly He found himself with His back up against (not a wall), but a lake—the Lake of Gennesaret. And He spied two boats on the shore belonging to some fishermen who were washing their nets; one of them named Simon (whom we also know as Peter). So He got into Simon's boat, asked him to put out a little from the land, and continued to teach the people from the boat. (Again, this story emphasizes the centrality of teaching, and the Word of Christ, for all who follow Him.)

Then the focus shifts to another Word from Jesus—a personal application of God's Word to one of His disciples. Our Lord had just finished teaching the crowd; now He tells Simon to “put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch.” But even though this word came from the Lord

and had a wonderful promise attached to it (namely a catch of fish), still this was a hard word for Simon to accept! For this master fisherman, who had just finished washing his nets after hours of fruitless effort said, *“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!”* Master, I just cleaned my nets and put them away; and now you’re asking me to get them dirty again. Master, I do know a little something about fishing. And it wasn’t by accident that we chose to fish at night. Now it’s the middle of the day, and we’re tired, and our nets are clean, and you’re telling us to start all over again!

Thus it often is still with Christ’s disciples today, isn’t it? Even if we gladly hear and learn God’s Word most every Lord’s Day. Even if, we gladly read and meditate on His Word daily in the discipline of our home devotional life. Still, how often does it happen that the Word of God that we hear is a hard word to accept? Maybe because it doesn’t make sense to our way of thinking. Maybe because it’s not what we want to hear. Maybe because it calls us to resign ourselves to an unhappy situation that we would rather avoid.

“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” “Go back, O Elijah, and return on your way, even though the people of Israel have killed the prophets with the sword, and now seek your life also.” “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.” “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” “Endure patiently your trying situation. For My grace is sufficient for you, and My power is made perfect in weakness.”

We hear God’s Word to us, like these; and how often don’t we react like Simon first did? *“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!”* Our first impulse is to argue, to elevate our human reason over God’s Word, or simply to ignore and avoid His Word when it isn’t what we want to hear. “Master, don’t you want me to be happy? And isn’t that more important than keeping your commandment?” “Master, haven’t you promised to forgive, so that it’s OK if I sin against your Word?” Or, worse yet, we even stop calling Jesus “Master” and quietly withdraw from being with Him in the ship of His Church, so that we don’t have to be confronted with a Word that we don’t want to hear.

But to Simon’s credit, his initial protest was only a token one. And immediately it gave way to a marvelous response of faith, *“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”*

You have spoken, Lord. And even though I don’t understand how this can be good for me... Even though it’s not what I want to hear right now... Even though I’m not looking forward to the trouble I’ll have to endure because of your Word to me... Still it is Your Word to me. And because it is your Word, it trumps all my thoughts, objections and desires. For you are God. And you are good. And you are perfectly wise. And you love me more than anyone else in the world, more than I love myself, more than I can ever comprehend. And so I will blindly trust that what your Word says to me is right for me. And I will let down the nets. I will submit my selfish desires to the needs of others. I will not let science become my God. I will stay in my marriage, and redouble my effort to love and serve until death parts us. I will joyfully live each day in the hospital room, or nursing home, or wherever you place me. I will confidently meet the challenges you have allowed to come into my life. I will let down the nets, and obey your Word!

And look how the Lord blessed Simon with a huge haul of fish that he never could have anticipated when he blindly obeyed Christ's command. Nets so full they began to tear! Boats so full they began to sink! So also the Lord blesses all who keep His Word, no matter what the appearance. We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith simply trusts God's promises. *"Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."*

Here Simon was blessed to see immediately the Lord's visible blessing upon his obedience to Christ's Word. But immediately Simon also grasped his utter unworthiness to have been so blessed. *"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*

Simon Peter rightly recognized what is true for all of us. His response of shame and humility, in falling down at Jesus' knees, is an example for all of us of God-pleasing repentance over our lack of trust in, and obedience to, God's Word.

What is not a good example for us is what Simon Peter said after he fell down at Jesus' feet. Shame, humility, and repentance are one thing. Pushing Jesus away is another. (But that is for another sermon.)

Let us savor instead our Lord's gracious Word of love and forgiveness to Simon Peter. *"Fear not!"* He said. And what is that, but a sweet word of absolution?!? *"Fear not!"* Though you rightly recognize Me as Holy God, all is well between you and Me, for I have covered your sin! *"Fear not!"* I hold nothing against you, because I obey My Father's Word perfectly in your place! *"Fear not!"* Though you are right to fall on your knees, and turn in repentance from your failure to love and trust My Word, I forgive you all your sin, because I give My own life in sacrifice on the cross for your sins.

Now you are free to start anew! Free to love your neighbor! Free to follow Me, and breathe in My Word, and receive Your life from it, and live every moment in the joy that it brings, as it frees you from guilt, and frees you to love, and frees you to see life and relationships and even trials in a whole new way! *"Fear not!"* Simon Peter.

*"Fear not!"* O disciples of Christ today. For in your Baptism, today and every day, your Savior gives you His highest Word, a Word that is folly to reason, but sweetest comfort to the downcast soul. It is the word of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ has died for your sins... that there is forgiveness with Him. And through that precious Word of the Gospel, He is pleased to save all who believe.

Dear friends in Christ, this Gospel Word of Christ crucified is bringing you His forgiveness again today, and every day that you are in the boat with Jesus. Here His Gospel Word is heard and tasted to raise you up from your knees, and to restore you, each time you fall, to your precious place as His disciples.

May God give you His grace each and every day to "press in" on the Savior, as He teaches in His Church. And may you cling to His Word in every situation, and trust it no matter the appearance, so that when you rise from the grave on the Last Day, you may *"Fear not!"*

For Jesus' sake. Amen.