Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The basis for today’s sermon is the Gospel lesson we just heard—the great catch of fish and Jesus calling the first disciples.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sitting...

It’s not easy being a Christian these days, but truth be told, it’s never been easy.

You’ve got the external pressures to succumb to the ways of this world, and there’s the pressure to capitulate to whatever wind of false doctrine today’s philosophy blows.

These external pressures, and even oppression, do not compare to another threat.

Far worse than anything that this world, or the Devil, or even this world servants can throw your way is an internal enemy—your own sinful flesh. Your old Adam is the greatest enemy to faithfulness.

See, your flesh doesn’t like to listen. It has its own ideas and priorities. It makes excuses and compromises, and wants nothing to do with Jesus and His word.

So, this is the conflict we struggle with—a conflict begun in you at your baptism. Which is why each day your old Adam must be plunged again back into those baptismal waters. Luther instructs us, in the catechism, to begin each day in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Praying, “Lord, keep me this day from all sin.” For as Luther said, “Your old Adam, your flesh, is a damn good swimmer.”
A new man is born in you through the small voice of your pastor, speaking the holy Name and applying water, as God does His saving work. And this new man, given to you in your baptism, is absolutely, utterly opposed to the old man. They disagree at every point, with no common ground.

Now it may seem that that new man, given to you in baptism, is weak. And the flesh, which we know all too well, is strong. But that's a lie the old man, your flesh, tells you. In reality, the word of God is living, active, powerful, sharp, and your flesh is what is weak. The new man in Christ, who dwells in you is ever living and strong.

But that's not how it feels, is it? It's not how it seems...for...it is received through faith.

Consider today's gospel—St. Peter is sitting in the boat, listening to the word of Jesus as He preached to the crowds gathered on the shore. We know Jesus preached repentance and that the Kingdom of God had indeed come among them. He preaches of the promise of the Holy Spirit and of heavenly joys for all those who are in Him.

All this Peter heard, and as a result came the beginnings of trust—of faith. Yet they were only the beginning, because Jesus then gives St. Peter a very clear word. A simple instruction. “Put out into the deep—let down your nets for a catch.” How hard is that? It’s simple. Just do it.

But Peter’s reason and experience get in the way. His faith is weak. “Whatever Master. We worked hard all night when the fishing is good, and received nothing.” However, we will do the opposite of what every bit of fishing wisdom tells us.

There’s a little bit of trust there, the beginnings of faithfulness.

We see ourselves in St. Peter as he vacillates from the confession of the one, true faith—“You are the Christ”—to unbelief, “Far be it Lord, I will go to death for you.” Peter flipped from faithfulness to unbelief in a heartbeat. Even after three years of catechesis—from Jesus—even that does not quite overcome St. Peter's old Adam. For after our Lord's resurrection and ascension into heaven, St. Peter is rebuked by St. Paul to overcome Peter's bias against the Gentiles. Until his death Peter struggled with unbelief.

Faith does not come easy.

Jesus calls, and you stay home.
Jesus leads, and you hesitate to follow Him where He goes.
Jesus speaks and you refuse to listen.
So, let’s be sympathetic with Peter and patient with each other—to those in the struggle of faith and un-faith, belief and doubt.

How then does Jesus work faith in you? Again, faith was given to you in your baptism, and it’s refreshed every time you confess your sins and are forgiven in absolution.

Moreover, it’s strengthened and nourished as you receive the Holy Supper. This is how Jesus promises to work faith in you, creating it, sustaining it and preserving it.

These means aren’t very impressive, are they?

Another lie that your flesh tells you is that God should work spontaneously, extraordinarily as opposed to regularly, institutionally, procedurally…normally. But instantaneous conversions leading to zealous true faith is extremely rare.

Our Lord may grant that—just like the great miracle of instantaneous fish. But the typical way that He works is the way He did with His own disciples, giving them His word and showing them who He is so that faith would be instilled and grow, by the work of His Spirit.

So, on that day, Peter and his deckhands listen—begrudgingly. They put out the boats and cast out the nets…and when they could barely get the haul into the boat, how does St. Peter react?

“Depart from Me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

This is too good to be true. This is too good for me.

My point is, conversion to faithfulness doesn’t happen overnight. It takes your whole life. For faith is strengthened through a lifetime of struggles, of joys and sorrows, of grief and mourning—while one hears and receives the living word and the gifts of Jesus. Sure, it appears weak. It doesn’t look very impressive, but it’s God in Christ creating, strengthening and preserving faith.

Know that the Lord is the One who casts the nets into the deep waters of this world. It’s the Lord who pulls men and women, boys and girls, young and old into His boat—that being, the Ark of the Holy Christian Church. He does this through water. Though a voice of command, though preaching and teaching, baptizing, feeding and drinking.

Jesus, then, tells Peter, who is down on his knees at this point, “Do not be afraid.”

Struggle against the flesh because I have overcome it.

Do not be afraid of death, for I have overcome that too.
Listen to Me, doing whatever I tell you and it will go well for you.

Your flesh doesn't want to listen to Jesus. It doesn't want to follow Him. But, the comforting word today is, the new man, that is Christ Jesus, who dwells in you richly, is stronger than you flesh.

And believing that, you have the peace of God which surpasses all understandings, guarding your hearts in Christ Jesus. Amen

We stand together...