

Rev. Danny Mackey
Fifth Sunday after Trinity
July 1, 2018
Luke 5:1-11
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

Jesus calls Simon and the sons of Zebedee from an old way of doing things to a new way. But Jesus’ call with its new way must’ve sounded foolish to those fishermen. “Jesus, you want us to fish at the wrong time of day...and in the wrong place?” “That’s not how it works, Jesus. That’s not how any of this works.”

Yet, what did the old way get the fisherman that night? “We toiled all night and took nothing,” says Simon. Our translation gives us an exclamation point with Simon’s words. Like most fishing stories, Simon’s claim sounds unbelievable! Really? Not even one little fish? My worse fishing trip ever snagged me a bunch of sticks and also one small perch. Surely, Simon and the other fisherman caught something! They’re professionals, aren’t they? Simon must be using hyperbole like so many of our politicians do—that is, he must be exaggerating to make his point. Or, is he? Simon, Zebedee’s sons James and John, and all the other workers knew what they were doing, they did their labor for a good long while, and still they came up with nothing. A completely fishless night.

I think their fish-devoid night was an object lesson. It taught two things: first, it showed Simon and the others the futility of the old way of doing things; and second, it proved their need for Jesus. It’s the same lesson we need, isn’t it? We go about things the way we always have, but they don’t work out the way they’re supposed to. Now, I’m not necessarily talking about how we do things in church as a congregation. I’m not necessarily saying something about our politics or government. However, those things are what people wanted from Jesus. They wanted Him to overthrow the Roman government and re-establish Israel. They wanted Him to walk into the synagogue and temple and shake things up. But would that have been any different than the same old way of doing things? Instead, Jesus begins His work not with the things of this world but with that which lasts everlastingly—Jesus begins with the heart.

The heart is deep. While scientists and explorers talk about the uncharted depths of the ocean and the vastness of outer space, poets and artists search the heart. The heart, as we speak of it in the English language, is the seat of your being, your humanity, your very core. The ancients spoke of it as the stomach or belly. Police officers and detectives call it their gut. But we most commonly speak of it as the heart. It's where you exist. It includes both your thoughts and your feelings. The heart is what motivates you and moves you. With His words "Put out into the deep," Jesus plumbs the depths of the fishermen's hearts.

If you want to know other people's hearts, consider what they do and say. Do they hurt others with insults, with punches, with the stealing of stuff? How do they speak? What do they look like? What are they wearing? How do they smell? And don't you expect others will judge you on the same? I do. So, if a person is nice and doesn't seem to be hurting or offending other people, then we call that person good.

We judge on externals, because we can't see the heart. Some of us try to reveal our hearts to others publicly with song, art, or great displays of emotion. Others of us only attempt to show our hearts to one or two people our whole lives—to a spouse, a dear friend, or a fellow tragedy sufferer. So people ask, "Can we really know another person? Can another really know us?" The closest we can come to knowing the heart of another is in the external things he or she says and does. And does that work? Can we see his or her heart? Still, it's all we've got, and that's why we rely on the outside, on the external things.

Jesus, though, can and does see the heart. He knows how to address it and work on it. And that's just what He does with Simon, James, and John. Because they worked with their hands, earned their living and fed their families by their labor, Simon and the others expected eternal things to work the same way. Admittedly, they'd been taught by the Pharisees that they needed to walk straight and live right to be good with God. But after having their boats commandeered by Jesus and getting front-pew seats for His teaching, they must've known Jesus was offering something different, something new. That's the only reason I can come up with Simon agreeing: "But at your word I will let down the nets."

The old way was about what we do to please God. Isn't that called works-righteousness? It's what I was taught. I was taught that what I did mattered more than what I believed. The work of my hands was of more value to my church than faith in my heart. I'll give you an example. While in the confessional booth one afternoon, I told Father Smith that I'd

punched my little brother, Zach. Father asked, “Do you feel bad about it?” I didn’t, so I said “no.” Then he asked, “Do you at least know that you should feel bad about it?” “I guess so,” I replied. Father Smith said something about how contrition is best, but he’d settle for attrition and my doing penance. I learned that day that it was more important that I said my Hail Marys than it was for me to feel sorrow in my heart.

You are given a better lesson today. From it you can learn that Jesus is concerned with the heart and not with what you do to please God. Jesus is concerned with the heart because, apart from Him, you can—to use the language of our lesson—you can toil all night and still catch nothing. Your work is powerless to provide what you need for eternity. So Jesus came to bring salvation to all who believe. He didn’t come to save those who can save themselves by their own works. He didn’t come to teach those who know all truth. He didn’t come to save those who believe in themselves. Jesus came so that you might believe in Him—believe in Him with your hearts—and thereby be saved.

Jesus is the new way, which is actually the first way God and humanity related. Luke’s language of the deep invokes Genesis 1 and the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. Humankind’s entire existence, both our hearts and our hands, were pure gift from God. God walked with our first parents in the garden during the cool of the day. But they sinned and gave us wayward hearts that resented and hated God. Because our hearts were afraid, we sought to appease God with work—but the work was futile.

Jesus does the work you can’t. He paid the price for your sin on the cross. He lived a perfect life of obedience on your behalf. He says to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Jesus makes the fish fill those nets! What does the text say about the catch? “Their nets were breaking” and “They came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink”! That’s a whole lot of fish! Jesus shows the fishermen and you that He alone provides what is needed—both in this life and the life to come.

Then Simon, aware that his work was futile, responds to the miraculous catch: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” But Simon doesn’t yet get it. His fear shows he still expects the old way of relying on himself. But Jesus encourages Simon and the others with His “Do not be afraid.” He directs them to Himself and casts away their fear. And then He makes a promise, conceiving the Church and establishing the apostolic ministry: “From now on you will be catching men.”

JESUS CALLS THE APOSTLES, ESTABLISHING THE MINISTRY, TO SHOW YOU HIS HEART.

Because you can't see another person's heart, you need external things to see it. So Jesus provides those external things—things that speak to and shape your hearts. And the calling of Simon, James, and John are an integral part of Christ showing His heart. He established the Ministry and the Church so that you might hear the language of His heart. "He who hears you, hears Me," He declared to the apostles. And the language of His heart is nothing less than the Gospel and its promises. Jesus' still Calls and sends His ministers with the Word that declares what He's done for you on the cross, does for you in the forgiveness of your sins, and will do for you come the resurrection.

The Gospel is more than words of affirmation. Rather, it's the same Word that created all things and creates within you new hearts, shaped by Christ's cross, which is the greatest sign of the greatest love of all. "No greater love than this, that one lay down his life for his friends," says Jesus. Indeed, He laid down His life for you.

The Gospel is more than a mere gift, whether that gift is as small as a trinket or as grand as a brand new car. The Gospel is the gift you never knew existed but now you can't live without. Indeed, it's the gift that gives life, because Jesus, who is the life of the world, gives Himself to you.

The Gospel is more than a gentle touch to show affection. Rather, it's the power of God for salvation for those who believe. Salvation is freedom from the threat of harm—in your hearts, your souls, your whole being. In this Gospel promise is the power to raise the dead and bring you into eternal God's presence, making your hearts glad, your whole being resounding in joy, and your flesh dwelling secure.

Therefore, behold Jesus' heart. Behold His heart in His cross for you. Behold His heart in His gifts, distributed by Simon and all those throughout the millennia ordained to show His love. It's not the old way where you must make your hearts and yourselves worthy for God. Rather, it's the new way where Jesus gives His heart so that you might be saved.

In His name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.