

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
21 July, Anno Domini 2019
St. Luke 5:1-11
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Luther prepared a wonderful sermon on this text which was the seed for much of today's sermon.

The Holy Gospel which we just heard is a wonderful opportunity for us to consider the relationship that we each have with the temporal and spiritual blessings of God. All good things come from God Almighty's hand. If we've said it once, we've said it a thousand times God is both our Creator and our Redeemer. Our physical and eternal life are both from Him. Neither is more important than the other nor should we imagine that God is only concerned with so-called spiritual things and unconcerned with earthly things.

But it has become very common in our day and even among us, I'm afraid, to equate temporal and spiritual gifts, to substitute one for the other and to seek after one and despise the other. We do this only at our great peril. Earthly blessings are not the righteousness of God nor are they to be equated with His love or assumed to be signs of the health of our faith in Christ. If they are, then our Lord was the most faithless of all men. We need to listen to the warning of St. Paul in 1 Timothy 6 "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world (not even our own selves), and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." (1 Timothy 6:6-10) And do not be fooled into imagining that it is only the love of money which can lead to your eternal destruction. The love and lust for anything earthly, anything that is not the righteousness of Christ, anything which causes us to forsake true heavenly treasure - whether it be money, health, wisdom, fun, beauty, praise, comfort, power, sex - any of these can be our downfall leading us into a death spiral of self-absorption. Luther writes "he who strives after possessions and will become rich, must fall into the temptations and snares of the devil." Beware. You aren't the one among all men who will escape the pitfalls of striving after earthly treasure nor are you more cunning than Satan who will use such desires to destroy you eternally.

That being said, it is certainly good to rejoice in the way in which God provides for our bodies, giving us daily bread and even sometimes far more and better than we even thought to ask for. The Second Commandment compels us to call upon God as we have need and to give thanks for what He provides. Luther listed just a few of those earthly gifts in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed - God created you both body and soul and He daily continues to provide you with things that you need both small and great from shoes to home to family. God is a faithful Father who will never fail to provide for the needs of His dear children. As King David confesses "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread." (Psalm 37:25) There is no NEED that you have that will go unmet, even if you don't know about that need. It is truly silly and, actually, wicked and blasphemous for us to ever worry about anything in this world. Such doubt in God's promises to you accuses God of being a liar. But we are experts at assuming the worst and turning every inconvenience and difficulty into a catastrophe from which there will be no deliverance as though this time God will fail me (even though He never has before).

Our Lord granted St. Peter and his fellow fishermen the catch of their life. No doubt Peter and the others had prayed for such a catch so that they could go to market, sell their massive haul, and retire early. God heard those prayers even as He hears yours. He hears when you pray "give us this day our daily bread". And though He had not provided such a catch before nor at the time and with the means which we would expect such a catch, He provided. And He provided when and how He did precisely because He was demonstrating to Peter and you exactly where those fish came from - not from Peter's expertise and skill but from the Lord's gracious hand and at His Word.

Certainly Peter and the others had toiled and strained all night long, tossing the nets over and over again. Their backs were aching. They were exhausted and frustrated because their labor had produced nothing. We are commanded to such work. The Lord commands us to put our hands to useful work to feed ourselves and our neighbor. But the fruit of that labor is always from the Lord. And sometimes He would make us wait, He would have us work when it appears useless so that our faith may rest alone in His provision and never in our work, so that while we work we pray and trust that at the proper time God will provide because He has promised.

And yet, even though the Holy Scriptures are filled with such examples of God's faithful and abundant provision (quail and manna in the wilderness, the ravens that fed Elijah, the widow's oil and flour that miraculously never ran out, the feeding of the thousands) we are quite often thankless and even discontent, like children who stare at a plate full of delicious food, picking through with a disgusted face and say "This isn't

really my favorite. Is there anything else?” That child’s parent would be rightly frustrated and even angry at such ingratitude shown not only to the one who labored in preparing the food but also to the Lord. But we are no different. We grumble and complain when we don’t receive more than enough for this day or when what we receive isn’t exactly what we wanted. We throw temper tantrums, we grow angry and anxious, we begin to feverishly grasp and hoard everything because God may have provided fish today, but whose to say He can or will tomorrow?

Repent. The Lord can and will provide for you tomorrow if tomorrow comes. His Word is filled with such promises and countless examples of how He has always fulfilled His promises. You only have what you have because the Lord has provided it in the way and at the time of His choosing. Give Him thanks. Praise Him for such abundant mercy which no one deserves or has earned by his hard work. But do not confuse even the most precious of these earthly blessings with the true gifts of God - the life and righteousness that He gives through His Son, Jesus Christ. The lesser gifts are only given to provide for your needs in this life and so that you may use them in service to others - your family, your church, your neighbor, your enemies. But too often we measure the goodness of God by the bounty of or the lack of earthly riches. We are amazed that God could actually provide such things but give hardly a passing thought to His Word which proclaims to us the salvation which Jesus has won for us, which lifts us out of the depths of eternal death and removes the crushing burden of our guilt from our conscience.

On the boat that day on the Sea of Galilee, the Lord used the earthly gift which Peter desired to draw his attention to the one thing that Peter actually needed - Jesus. In the presence of Jesus’ divine authority over creation, Peter was made suddenly aware that all the fish in the world meant nothing in the hour of judgment. Peter was a sinner. He was filled with idolatry and greed and covetousness. He was more concerned with having a full belly and flush bank account than he was with the well-being of his soul. Only when it was made undeniably clear that he was literally standing face to face before the God of heaven and earth did reality set in. Peter had no choice but to recognize that he, who was filled with all manner of uncleanness - evil desires, thoughts, words, and deeds - deserved God’s wrath and judgment. He had spurned God’s Word, rebelled against the holy will of God, and sought only after earthly pleasure. His heart was as filled with sin as his boat was filled with fish - to the point of drowning him.

And in his terror Peter cried out the only thing that our sinful flesh can think to say “Get away from me, Lord!” Now suddenly, the great catch of fish wasn’t so great. And it didn’t matter because it couldn’t help him. It held in his face the threat of his own destruction. Peter couldn’t delude himself into thinking that God loved him

simply because business was booming. But, as usual, Peter's flesh, like all flesh, was wrong. Jesus wasn't Peter's problem. Peter's sin and death were and Jesus was the answer.

Praise be to Jesus that He denied Peter's request. He drew even nearer to Peter and preached the Gospel into those sinful ears "Do not be afraid." Jesus' presence is exactly what Peter needed. Jesus as near as He can possibly be is the true and only need of every sinner, every afflicted and terrified conscience, every beleaguered soul, every body that is squeezed by death's iron grip, every depressed and anxious and confused mind. Jesus is what you need. Not more money. Not better health. Not drugs or alcohol or pornography. Those will kill you. Jesus is everything you need because Jesus is the promise of God's mercy and His desire to be near you and to remove your fear. Jesus is life, eternal life. Jesus, God's Son in your flesh, does not draw near sinners to harm them or to condemn them. He always draws near to save them from death. We don't want Jesus to go away from us. Those who acknowledge and confess their sins, who acknowledge that unless God is merciful they are lost, desire the presence of this humble and kind Savior above everything else. They long to hear His Word of forgiveness. They hunger for the food of His Body and Blood that bring life and salvation.

And those who hunger for the life and righteousness which Jesus gives will never be dissatisfied. They will always be filled. They will have no fear of death because Jesus has already died their death and risen from the grave. They will not hunger or thirst because Jesus will fill their souls to overflowing with mercy and peace. They will be content with their daily bread because they know in Jesus the love and care of their heavenly Father who will give them nothing less than everything they need. Their hearts will not be troubled by bad news or trial because Jesus remains near them and never withdraws His promise of life and the Father's love.

The only ones who will not find comfort in Jesus are those who do not want to or refuse to. Those whose hearts hunger for the things of the world, who satisfy their souls with earthly treasure, who will not confront sin and death and seek after the mercy of God in Christ will find that they are never satisfied. They will always want more. On the Day of Judgment Christ will no longer a comfort but a terror because then they will have no choice but to acknowledge Him. On that day they will face judgment without mercy because they wanted none, they couldn't be troubled by it in this life, they thought themselves above it. Some will have refused the warnings. Some will have refused the promises and vainly sought to appease God with their works. They will perish because whether their hearts chased after works or wealth, they chased after the things of this world and not the gifts which Christ alone can

give. Then Christ will depart entirely from them and they will be left to drown in death for all eternity.

Do not let these things be true of you. Jesus draws near today to save you and to fill you with eternal riches - with forgiveness, with peace, with life. Do not chase after those things which cannot satisfy and which cannot save. What Christ gives is more than enough because it is everything. He spares no mercy. He leaves no need unmet. Do not confuse His earthly blessings with the salvation He gives through His Word. Let that gracious Word be your every treasure and comfort. Your Lord will provide fish when necessary. But don't chase after them. Be about the work your Father has given you to do and trust Him to supply the fruit in due season. Content yourself with what He has given you today and be generous in sharing. Join Peter and the other disciples and leave all trust in worldly things behind and follow Christ who will graciously fill you to overflowing with the treasures of His heavenly kingdom.

In the Name of +Jesus.