

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 5, 2013

Luke 5:1-11ⁱ

Part I

One thing a young person has to do growing up is decide on a vocation. In order to help young people do that, some schools have vocational days. Professionals are invited to the school to talk about their vocations. Other schools give students a pass for a day. With the pass they can shadow a parent or some other adult, doing their vocation.

One vocation that's not very common among us is that of fisherman. While it isn't, a former sainted member of Saved By Grace was a fisherman. His name was Griff. Griff was born and raised in Panama. As a young man he worked on a tuna fishing boat. I can remember him talking about being on the ocean, under the blue sky, fishing for tuna. When a fish got hooked sometimes it took hours to haul in the fish. Other times more than one fisherman was required to help reel in the catch. The outdoors, the adventure, the labor was very captivating for Griff when he was young.

Part II

Like Griff, the disciples in our lesson were fisherman. As the lesson begins, we find them washing

their nets. That is, they were cleaning them. They had gotten filled with debris during a night of fishing. Seaweed, branches, dirt and garbage got tangled in them. So, they cleaned their nets. They needed their nets clean to work efficiently. After all, nets were the tools of the trade.

The thing is they had come back from fishing without any fish. To be sure, they had gone out at night. It was the best time for fishing. They fished the best parts of the sea. They did what their trade knew, but had nothing to show for it. It wasn't good for business, that's for sure. They couldn't pay the bills that way.

Having nothing to show for work, speaks to the trials of vocation. In today's vocations, be they at the workplace or home, you can in put long hours; work your fingers to the bone. You can learn and use the best techniques of the trade. Yet, sometimes, the returns are small. You don't see the results you need. If you don't get the results you need, it impacts making a living.

What's more, in your vocation you have a job to do. You make plans to get it done in a timely way. The job goes along smoothly when all of sudden a monkey wrench is thrown into the mix. The monkey wrench has to be dealt with before you can move on. It makes it hard to get the job done on time. That gives you headaches and frustrations.

If that is not enough, there is the tightening of budgets. That puts added strains on the worker. More

work is piled on to get more out of labor. Even when labor meets the extra demands, one is not sure the job will be there tomorrow. At home it can be hard to stretch the dollar and pay the bills. It stresses us out and keeps us up at night.

Piled on top of all this are disagreements in vocation. Management and labor, households and families, don't always see eye to eye. It can make for hard feelings. Working in those conditions makes work harder than it is under normal circumstances.

These trials in vocation are all a result of the fall. When Adam sinned, God told Adam, "Cursed is the ground for your sake... Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you....In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.ⁱⁱ" The sweat of the brow, the thorns and thistles, the disagreements and stresses, the frustrations and small returns are all a result of sin; and sin reminds us we need help. We do, because sin, at the end of the day, ends in death.

Part III

That was true for the fishermen in our lesson, too. That brings us back to their night of empty returns. There was a special reason for that this time. They were not successful *so that* Jesus could make use of the opportunity...and that is what he did.

After Jesus finished teaching the crowd, he told Peter and his partners to let down their nets for a catch.

To Peter it sounded like Jesus didn't know what he was saying. It wasn't the right time for fishing. Every fisherman knew that, but out of respect for Jesus, Peter does what Jesus says. "Master" – we might say "Sir" - "At your word I will let down the net."

That is, Peter took Jesus at his word; and Jesus' word got results! So, Peter and his partners begin pulling in the net. The net is swollen with a catch of live flopping fish. It was so swollen that it begins tearing. It is more than swollen and tearing. The net is so heavy with fish they can't even get it in the boat without extra help. In the excitement of it all, the boat is tipping and filling with water as they try and draw in the net.

When Peter saw that, it had a profound effect. This was *not* natural. It was not the right time for fishing. Not only that, but their nets were bursting with fish. They didn't even get such a great catch when the fishing was good at night. It was an *extraordinary* catch. It all said to Peter that Jesus *transcended* the laws of nature; that Jesus had nature under his feet. There is only one who could do that, the Lord.

When Peter realizes it he shrinks back from Jesus in holy fear. No longer does he call him, "Master," or "Sir," a title of respect. Now he calls him, "Lord." Lord is the title used for God's name. That is, Peter is painfully aware that he, a sinner, is before the holy God. He is unworthy to stand before him.

And, the Lord, how does he treat Peter, the sinner? Does he give him what he deserves? No. He treats him graciously. He says to Peter, "Do not be afraid." Jesus, in effect, absolves him of his sin. It is what Jesus did for Peter in the midst of his vocation as fisherman.

Jesus does the same for you and me in the midst of our vocations. You and I spend most of our lives at work. A normal forty hour a week plus the commute means that most of your waking hours are spent on your vocation. Not only that, but the typical homeowner has to devote even more hours to keeping up the home. And, if you are a parent, your work is never done. It all adds up. Work wears on us. We do suffer hard feelings from disagreements. There are frustrations and stresses.

Yet, here we take time out of our work week. Like Peter, we stand before the Lord. We are in his presence in Word and Sacrament. We stand before him full of sin from the work week; full of the debris that gets caught in the net of our trades. It is the debris of hard feelings, worries, doubts. We come before him, then, as sinners; unworthy sinners. We can only fall on our knees before him. It's how we enter church each Sunday, by a confession of sin.

Upon that confession Jesus does for us what he did for Peter. He who put the laws of nature under his feet also put sin and death under his feet. Jesus put them under his feet at the cross. On the cross, laden with the sin of the world, Jesus was cast into the depth of hell, as

it were. So, by Jesus' cross, *your sin* was cast *from you* into the depth of the sea. It is gone; gone from you for good. There's no doubt about it, either. Jesus came back from the dead to say so.

It all goes to say that Jesus is not only Lord over nature, but he is also Lord over sin and death. Because he is now you can stand before God unafraid by standing in Jesus. Standing in Jesus you are forgiven, accepted and loved by God. You are here and now and in the world to come. That is the word of absolution you hear as you enter God's presence each Sunday.

Part IV

After Jesus spoke this word of grace to Peter, Jesus called Peter and his partners to a new vocation. He called them to leave their vocation for another vocation; to leave the vocation of fisherman for the vocation of fishers of men; to leave their nets and take another tool of the trade in hand, the net of the gospel. They were to cast the gospel net not from a wooden boat; it was to be cast from the boat of the church. They were to cast the gospel net not into the watery sea; it was to be cast into the sea of the world.

Somewhere, a long time ago, someone cast that net over your and my pagan ancestors. That gospel net drew them out of paganism. Our ancestors became a part of the Jesus' catch that was hauled into the church. They, in turn, cast the net in our lives. The same net hauled us

into Jesus' boat. In his boat we have become part of Jesus' fishing business.

That doesn't mean all of us are called to the vocation of public ministry, like Peter and his partners were. Even so, all of us have been called to be Christians. As Christians we rub shoulders in our vocations with the world day after day. We rub shoulders in the workplace and the community, in our families and the neighborhood. As we do, they learn that we are Christians. Our public attendance at church tells them so.

There comes a point in life when those with whom we rub shoulders, might have trouble. It might be trouble in the family, a stay in the hospital, the death of a loved one. It is then that they might look to you for help. About such times Peter wrote, "Be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.ⁱⁱⁱ" That doesn't mean you have to be a dynamic speaker. It means to simply talk about the faith; to talk about what God has done for us in Jesus; that his cross takes away the sinner's sin; that he promises to be with us in trouble.

In that way the net is cast; and the gospel net does the work. It catches. It does so on God's terms, not ours. As it does, God gathers into his boat. In his boat sinners are rescued from the sea of sin and unbelief. They are rescued even as God has rescued you.

Part V

It's what Jesus does for you and me, unworthy sinners that we are. We are unworthy sinners who sin in our vocations; who feel worries, doubts, and hard feelings. Our sin turns God in anger from us. Yet, God in his mercy gave Jesus all our sin. As he did, he turned from him and Jesus took God's anger for you and me. Now he invites you to come; to eat and drink. As you bow before him, he touches your lips with his body and blood. His blood takes away your sin. Absolved, he draws you to follow him; to hear his word; and following him he keeps you safe. You are safe in the boat of his church until he brings you safe to shore in heaven. Amen!

ⁱ Citations of the text (NKJV) will not be cited in the sermon

ⁱⁱ Genesis 3.17-19

ⁱⁱⁱ I Peter 3.15