

Epiphany 5     2/10/19  
Luke 5:1-11     C

“DO NOT BE AFRAID; FROM NOW ON YOU WILL BE CATCHING MEN.”

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... [So] God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood (Gen 6:5, 11-14b).

Our Gospel lesson for today teaches us there is only one place of rescue for sinful mortals -- the boat, the boat of the Church. Just as the ark preserved Noah from the wickedness of the earth and the floodwaters, so the ark of the Church of Jesus Christ saves us from the wickedness of this present age and the flood of sin, death, and hell.

In this season of Epiphany, we rejoice that Christ has appeared to us and that He has made His Boat a place of rescue and safety for us. In our lesson, Jesus got into Simon’s boat and “asked him to put a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the people from the boat (v. 3).” Because Christ is present in the boat, it becomes a symbol of the church. The boat becomes the place where Christ proclaims the kingdom and where He is present with us through His Word. The Rev. Dr. Luther captures the significance of all the imagery: the sea is the world, the fish are people, the net is the preaching of the Gospel, and the boat is the church.

Throughout the Old Testament, the “depths of the sea” symbolize chaos, upheaval, troubles, death. The “sea” is this world of sin. The “fish” are those souls created in the image of God, swimming the tide of daily

struggles, feebly struggling with sin, death, and Satan; and those for whom Christ died. The net is the Gospel, the Good News of salvation in Christ.

Through the water and the Word of Baptism, Christ has “caught us alive” in the net of His Gospel and brought us into His boat. Now, we trust, rejoice, and find Gospel in Jesus Christ alone.

The early Church had this very much in mind when it named this part of the Church building in which we worship the “nave.” “Nave” is Latin for “boat, ship, ark”. As one sails on a journey to a destination, we are sailing on a journey in the boat of the Church through this valley of the shadow of death to the safe harbor of heaven for eternity.

As we sail, the wind and waves may unsettle us; the storms and tempest may beat upon us; we may encounter floating debris on our passage. And, yes, temptation to doubt the promises of God’s Word and temptation to sin will come. The devil, the world, and our own sinful nature will never stop trying to mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great sins.

The Rev. Dr. Luther readily understood what it means to be a saint in the Church Militant. Luther said this,

“If Christ is to help, there must be trials, trouble and toil, and it must come to this, that we despair of all human counsel, comfort, and ability. Then He comes with His help, and shows that He still has the means of comfort, counsel, protection, and deliverance, and that He is able to bestow all this when everything else has failed us, and when all that we have done or suffered, and still may be able to do, is nothing and in vain; yea, that in such need and weakness He gives and helps in richer measure than could be done by all human power, skill, and aid.”

Simon -- we better know him as Peter -- knew the truth of Luther’s words. Simon and his partners were fishermen by vocation. All night, they

had toiled, with nothing to show for their labors.

But, then Christ came with His Word of promise and, as Luther says, Peter despaired of all human power, skill, and aid. In faith, he turned to Christ, trusting in His Word of Promise.

In the footsteps of Peter, we despair of ourselves and everything of this world. We know there is no safety, no security, no peace in our good works, our good intentions, how much money we have in the bank, or how many toys we have. Like Peter, we turn in faith to Christ alone, because Christ Jesus has saved us from the wickedness of this present age.

Remember that in the Old Testament, the “depths of the sea” symbolize chaos, upheaval, troubles, death. To save us from all that, Jesus was born of virgin mother and wore a human body just like ours, so that He could take onto Himself all the chaos, upheaval, troubles; all our sin and all its wages of death. He carried it all to the cross, where He laid to atone for all of it. And you can be certain that He did atone for it, and was victorious over it because He rose to life again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.

The Gospel net was cast out and caught you, Dear Child of God, at the font of your baptism to bring you into the ark of His Church. As God kept faithful Noah and his family safe from the flood waters in the ark, so He has shut us up in His own Body, the ark of His Church, so that we may be safe from the wickedness of this present age and flood waters which threaten us. As God led Noah to safe ground, so He will lead us to the safe ground of heaven for eternity.

As we sail, safe in the ark of Christ, to heaven, let us not forget those souls who still swim the in chaos and upheaval of the deep. Our Lord calls upon us to cast out the net of the Gospel to the depths of the sea. As a fisher of men, you are to tell the Good News about Jesus.

When we hear “we are to be fishers of men,” and talk of evangelism, it is almost as though it’s a guilt trip for us. No, evangelism is not a guilt trip. Recall the words of Jesus, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men (v. 10).” Did you catch that promise? Not “might” catch, not “maybe” catch; will catch. Baptized and living in Christ, we are merciful, as He is merciful to us. Once you were lost fish in the chaos of the deep sea, but someone, a parent, spouse, friend, Sunday School teacher -- in my case it was my parents who brought me to the baptismal font -- someone took the time to tell you the Good News about Jesus.

We remember the words of Paul,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor 1).

God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from our loving Father in heaven.

The miracle in our lesson is that the nets that could find no fish now find an overabundance of fish because of the word of Jesus. His command to us always contains the promise, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Is 55).”

You know the story of the great ocean liner, **Titanic**. On April 15, 1912, the Titanic struck an iceberg and, in less than three hours, plunged 12,000 feet to the Atlantic floor. Although 20 lifeboats and rafts were launched, many were only partly filled. To keep themselves from being swamped, the panic-filled people in the partially filled lifeboats rowed **OUT** of reach of the stranded souls who were trying to stay afloat in the icy

water. It wasn't long before those voices were stilled as exhaustion and cold took their toll.

But, one lifeboat, lifeboat #14, rowed back to the scene after the ship slipped from sight. Alone, it chased the cries in the darkness, seeking and saving a precious few.

Today, Concordia is lifeboat #14. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is lifeboat #14. God has told us to go back and rescue others, to make disciples of all people. Do not assume its someone else's job to share Christ with your neighbor. Don't ignore them, pretending they are not even there. Row back and pull them into the ark of Christ's Holy Christian Church.