

A king looked for in Jerusalem is born in Bethlehem. The Son of Man portrayed in Daniel coming from the skies, arrives instead through birth to a human mother. The Kingdom is announced, not as a declaration that the end of the age has come, but as an exhortation for every person to repent of his or her sins. The mighty Savior comes not with weapons of war but with words. His foe is not boots and swords of Rome, but Satan and his legions. Finally, and most all: The Redeemer turns out to be a teacher sent from heaven, comes not to usher in a new global order, but a new way of life in the world that is.



This theme of the ordinary and mundane continues, then, in his choice of ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, his envoys to proclaim his reign to all nations. He selects for this commission not men learned in Scripture or schooled in rhetoric, but fishermen. In fact, at the very moment he calls them to become the first preachers for his Church, they are hard at work, while others are more tuned in to our Lord as he teaches the crowds. These men do not even leave their fishing-nets until he has first come over and interrupted them.

Many people, of course prefer this kind of separation – a wall between our daily work and God's Word. The Word is something for church on Sunday, but on Monday work is work. Simon, James, & John are Jews of Galilee; perhaps last Sabbath they attended synagogue. But it's Tuesday; they have work to do; they can't stop and listen to this Jesus!

So, he simply goes over and enters their workplace, bridging their work to his work with the request to use one of their boats as a pulpit. Now, here we see that they must have been listening and have gained some respect for him, for despite their futile exhaustion and their hurry to wash the nets and get home, they agree to row him out from shore.

How generous of Simon; yet he has no sense of the power that is about to move into his heart and life and suddenly change his future. Simon still has that wall in place – he will manage the boat, while Jesus preaches to those who actually need to hear him.

But then everything changes. Christ finishes his sermon and turns to Simon – this time not with a request, but with two imperative verbs:

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

With these commands, the Son of God smashes through the wall between the sermon and the workplace, between Simon's daily vocation and the Kingdom. Christ invades Simon's turf – although Simon may not realize it – in order to lay claim to his loyalty and obedience.

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

The professional fisherman's reply is polite but still unbelieving:

"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!"

That title, "Master," is one of respect, but it is also a division-word. In other words, "I respect you as a teacher, but don't tell me how to fish."

He has no idea that the man in his boat is, in human flesh, the very Word from God's mouth that made the universe – that the man who just said, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets," is the Word of God who created oceans and rivers and lakes, fish and all sea creatures. A Genesis 1 miracle is about to occur on Lake Galilee, and occur it does! The nets almost get torn apart because there are so many fish!

Suddenly Simon and his partners have learned two lessons, one old and one new. The first lesson is a reminder of what every fisherman & factory worker & homemaker & attorney & teacher must never forget: that day in and day out our work works only because God is loving and generous to us on a daily basis. To say that we make anything or achieve anything is true only if we add, "by the fatherly divine goodness and mercy" of our God.

How easily you and I sit in church and vocally worship God, while preserving the illusion that worship and God are one thing, and our work in the real world another! How frequently God hears from us no morning prayer on the way to work, and no thanksgiving when we pick up our check, because we really don't believe that he "richly and daily provides all that we need to support this body and life."

But Simon receives an even more amazing lesson, and his awareness of it is signaled by a noun-change in his speech. He who a moment ago put Jesus in his place with the preacher-man word, "Master," now says to him:

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man... O Lord."

And he cannot even call him "Lord," standing up; he is forced by his own awareness of the divine glory to get down on his knees in his own boat.

Do you realize what this text from Luke 5 is? This is the first worship of Jesus Christ by one of his disciples recorded by Saint Luke! Luke – who will travel with Saint Paul and witness the spread of the Gospel and the founding of churches where every Lord's day sinners call in faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ – will also carefully record this first praying of the Kyrie in a boat, when a sinner named Simon realized that he was face-to-face with his Lord. It dropped him to his knees.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, how many thousands of miles below this height of reverence has Christian worship fallen in so many churches? In how many Lutheran churches, in particular, has the entire sense of entering the presence of a holy, righteous, and judging God been replaced by the ambience of an entertainment event? How many of us get up casually, throw on some clothes, and saunter in – as if we were not summoned here by the risen and ascended Lord, who on the cross became our only confidence to stand before God at all?

The shepherds were overcome with fear when the angels preached to them from the sky. The women were overcome with fear when they heard why the tomb was empty. The disciples in the boat suddenly feared the Lord more than they feared

the power of the sea. But not us. Christ no longer overwhelms us. When we come to worship we wonder and demand to know how we shall be stimulated. Even during the Holy Communion our minds wander to and fro as we observe what clothes other people are wearing. We forget in whose presence we stand or kneel.

But Simon knows this, by God's grace. He has been mercifully brought to his knees, and left able only to utter a miserable prayer. Thus is he ready for the biggest surprise of all. Now that Christ has shown him that he is Simon's Lord and God, he takes him away from that career and gives him another. And what grace his Lord will extend over him. Three denial and one crucifixion later, he will still say to him, "Feed my sheep."

Simon is about to leave his boat for good and become an Apostle. And for this we thank God – that on that day by the shores of Lake Gennesaret the Son of God not only taught us all something about our daily vocations, but that on that day and on many thereafter he has taken men away from other vocations to make them prophets, apostles, and evangelists, pastors and teachers.

But for each one vocationally redirected as he was, there live and work a thousand whose occupations do not change – men and women who stay at a task, a station in life, that outwardly seems to go on as before. Nothing has changed – except the person into whose heart and mind the light of God's forgiving love has shone. And from that person comes forth a new attitude and behavior, that often has such an effect that others seek to learn why. In the later second century the pagan Celsus scoffed at Christianity because, as far as he could tell, its spokesmen were mostly men and women who worked in manual occupations.

We thank God that his Son removed Simon from fishing and made him a preacher of the Good News of the Kingdom, so that we here today could learn and receive the saving grace of God. Amazing grace it is, and it began when our Lord interrupted his sermon to interrupt and transform the lives of fishermen. ✠