

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Luke 5:1-11

In our Gospel passage today we see the warp and woof of the Christian life. Warp and woof are the underlying structure of a woven fabric made from yarn or thread. The underlying structure of the Christian life is the Word of God and the Lutheran doctrine of vocation. These two things provide the God pleasing structure for your life.

God creates and sustains life with His Word and puts men and women in various stations in life to work. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1) by speaking. "And God said..." and it was so. And "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." (Gn 2:15) And God blessed Adam and Eve and "said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Gn 1:28)

Hearing God's Word, procreation, and work are pre-fall gifts that God has given to us. Even though we and creation are fallen, we still have these wonderful blessings of God that make our life rich. It is true, however, that these blessings are tainted and hindered because of sin. The obstacles of your old man, Satan, and the world try to prevent you from hearing God's Word. There is pain in childbirth and the raising of kids. There is toil in work. But even with these obstacles, God still blesses us richly through His Word.

Peter has dominion over the fish of the sea. He made his livelihood from the sea so that he could support his family and provide fish for people to eat. He is a small cog in God's good order to provide daily bread. As happens with fishing in a fallen world, he has spent a toil filled night fishing with nothing to show for it. Normally, labor produces fruit. You reap what you sow.

One of the ways that Proverbs puts it is like this, “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. She prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.” (Pr. 6:6, 8) Ben Shapiro has identified three things that lead to someone not ending up in poverty in America regardless of your starting point: “graduate high school, get a full time job, and get married before having kids.” Basically, it’s the idea that if you externally follow the Ten Commandments, you’ll receive temporal blessings. And this is generally true. Job shows us however, that sometimes God may allow you to suffer to test you or to show your faith under trial.

Counterintuitively, Jesus shows us today that every blessing comes from God regardless of the work we put in. From the first article of the Apostle’s Creed we know that, “God has made me and all creatures. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.” (LSC)

Jesus tells Peter to cast the nets he has labored to clean and mend back into the water when Peter, from his experience as a professional fisherman, knows there aren’t any fish to be caught. Peter has dominion over the fish of the sea, but Jesus is the creator and sustainer of the fish in the sea. Peter’s nets become so full of fish the nets start breaking! Peter toiled at the right time all night and caught nothing. At the command of Jesus, Peter doesn’t toil and receives a once in a lifetime catch of fish.

Far too often we have the attitude that we deserve the blessings we have. What we mean by this is that we are self-made people who have succeeded with little to no help from other people or God. It’s an “I earned this so I can do whatever the heck I want” kind of attitude. In a lot of ways, that’s the standard “American” attitude. We forget that God has placed us in

different stations in life where we serve our neighbor in love. In a nutshell, this is the doctrine of vocation.

The third section or eighth chief part of the Small Catechism is the “Table of Duties.” The Table of Duties teaches us how to act in our stations in life. Most of us didn’t really get introduced to this part in our confirmation or, in my case, adult information classes. It seems like you barely have time for the six chief parts and this is a shame. The table of duties will not teach you how to be an accountant or a math teacher, but it will show you how to carry yourself within whatever particular job you may have, even if your job is to be retired!

God uses this table of duties to teach us how to have an orderly society. God is a God of order. The only reason we can have the vocation of science is because God created an orderly universe. One of the disheartening things about the defunding the police narrative is that people are crying out not against injustice, but against the very God who created them. When there is God’s intended order in life, then you can actually have real justice and civil rest and real punishment of injustice. When there is a breakdown in God’s intended order in life, then all manner of sin and injustice flourish.

Since we live in a sinful world, we’ll always have the presence of sin and injustice. George Floyd was an unjust man who was murdered unjustly by an unjust man. That kind of injustice will exist until our Lord comes back again in glory to rescue us from this vale of tears.

Jesus, however, knows about injustice personally. He was sinless and did all things well. He has the very words of life. They are so powerful, the crowd crashes against Him to strain to hear these words of life so that Jesus must sit in the boat to teach. His teaching was always powerful and popular with the crowds. Jealousy and hatred led the Pharisees to unjustly charge Jesus with blasphemy and have Him crucified as the worst kind of criminal. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for our good.

“[Just] as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” (Jn 3:14) As Paul says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree...’ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

This wonderful gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life comes to you by hearing the Word of Christ. The crowd was enthralled with Jesus’ words. Peter was busy cleaning and mending his nets. He really didn’t seem to be listening to Jesus carefully. When you’re listening to something that you think is important, you give it your full attention, don’t you? The crowd believed that Jesus’ words were the words of life and couldn’t get enough. Peter was distracted until Jesus got onto his boat and commanded him to cast his nets into the deep.

When Peter saw what happened, he understood there was more to Jesus than just a mere itinerant teacher. He was the LORD. Peter’s words reveal his understanding of his own sin, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (v. 8) When the profane comes into contact with the Holy, the profane can’t stand in its presence. Unless the profane is made holy, he is lost forever. Thanks be to God, Jesus came to make the profane holy.

Jesus tells Peter, “Do not be afraid.” (v. 10) Isaiah, Zechariah and Mary heard these same wonderful words. Isaiah heard, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.” (Is 6:7) It’s as if the angel said, “Don’t be afraid for your sin is atoned for and you have peace with God.” Zechariah heard, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.” (Lk 1:13) God hears the prayers of his saints. Mary heard, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Lk 1:30)

It's like you hear these words in your baptism: "Do not be afraid, dear child of God, your sin is atoned for, I hear your prayers, and you have favor with Me!"

Jesus makes Peter a fisher of men. As a fisherman, Peter used boats and nets. As a fisher of men, Peter uses words as nets to fill the holy ark of the church with believers when and where the Holy Spirit wills. Peter says that the apostles didn't "follow cleverly devised myths when [they] made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but [they] were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Ptr 1:16) John says it this way, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 Jn 1:3)

Dear Christian. You are body and spirit. Your body and spirit are never meant to be separated. God nourishes your spirit with His holy Word which gives you life now and eternally. He nourishes your body with daily bread which is all you need to support this body and life now and eternally. You are body and spirit now and you will be body and spirit when Christ comes again and raises you from the dead.

The warp and woof of the Christian life is the Word of Christ and serving your neighbor in love. God creates and sustains life in you with His Word. God offers daily bread to others through the life you live in service to them. This is where the Small Catechism is so handy.

Luther's Small Catechism is not meant just to be regurgitated in confirmation class so you can go to the Lord's Supper and then forgotten. What comes to mind when I say, "Luther's Small Catechism?" Is it the book you used during confirmation class? You've probably seen the current one and it's pretty big. It's a nice resource if you want an in depth study of what we believe, but that's not what I mean when I say, "Luther's Small

Catechism." What I mean can fit on a poster. It's in our little giveaway book called, "A Simple Explanation of Christianity." It's the six chief parts which includes "The Ten Commandments," "The Creed," "The Lord's Prayer," "Baptism," "Confession," and "The Lord's Supper." It also includes "Daily Prayers" and the "Table of Duties." Some versions also include "Christian Questions with their answers" as a preparation for receiving the Lord's Supper. That's it. Scripture verses and simple explanations. You can recite the six chief parts in under twenty minutes.

Luther's Small Catechism is unique in the world of catechisms. A catechism merely is a presentation of your basic beliefs. Even the churches that say they don't believe in creeds have a section on their website that lists their basic beliefs. The irony seems lost on them, but is evident to those of us who are used to creeds. I've read many catechisms. Luther's Small Catechism is the only one that you can pray. This is a key to how Luther intended it to be used.

The Small Catechism provides the framework for using God's Word in your life. Recitation and prayer of Luther's Small Catechism gets it embedded deep into your mind. Bible stories, Psalms, and good, old Lutheran Hymns fill the catechism out so that you have an abiding rich trust in the promises of your savior, Jesus Christ. And that is the end goal of catechesis, or use of the catechism: faith in Christ. Then, as you work where God has placed you, you have a rich resource already in your mind to give a reason for the hope you have in Christ. (1 Ptr 3:15)

Today's Gospel passage has led to some misunderstanding of evangelism and mission. It's not your job to convert the world for Christ. That's the Holy Spirit's job. He uses His Word. It's your job to be faithful where God has placed you. We can apply Jesus' words about worry to this: "Do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." (Mt 6:34) In other words, "don't be anxious about sharing Christ with everyone but share Christ with those whom God has put into your life."

The current trend is that everything has to be a “mission” for God. This is not a Lutheran or clear way of thinking. If you’re a shoemaker, God doesn’t care if you put crosses on the shoes, He cares if you make great shoes. The shoemaker doesn’t honor Christ by making his work appear Christian, but by making work that actually serves his neighbor. If you’re a nurse, God doesn’t care if you leave tracts with people you serve, but if you actually provide great care for the person you’re serving.

In fact, there are even times when it would be foolish to share the gospel. In some situations, you may lose your livelihood and then you won’t be able to care for your family. Don’t worry, there will be plenty of opportunities to share the gospel. If you live with unwavering faith in the promises of Christ, people will notice and people will ask. If you live with “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind [and] you do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless” (1 Ptr 3:8-9) people will notice and ask you about it. And then you will have the opportunity to share the words of Christ so they too might repent and believe in Him.

And here’s another shameless plug for praying and remembering your Catechism... if you have the small catechism learned by heart, you don’t even need a Bible on hand when you share the Gospel and you can be confident you’re sharing the entire counsel of God!

The Word and your vocation is the warp and woof of your Christian life. Stay in the Word and live fearlessly by that Word where God has placed you. He will continue to bless you and keep you and He will bless others through you.

In Jesus name. Amen.