

The Fifth Sunday after Holy Trinity
Luke 5:1-11

[introduction]

“The crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the Word of God.” (v. 1)

Can you imagine this scene? The crowd was so insistent on hearing the Word of God, they pressed Jesus so that He had to get into a boat to continue preaching!

Now I want you to think about this: If someone comes to you with their problems, is there any good reason for them to listen to you?

This is a serious question.

As you already know, Christianity grows through the proclamation of the Word. Now it's true that pastors are the ones set aside to do this professionally and all the time. But it is also true that every Christian is called upon to bear witness to and for Christ. God, in His infinite wisdom, uses fallible people to proclaim an infallible message. You and I are the body of Christ on earth. As St. Paul says in Ephesians 1, “And [God] put all things under [Jesus'] feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (vv. 22-23) I pray you find this as daunting as I do.

Now the message of Jesus and the Apostles were accompanied by miracles. In some passages it says that people saw the miracles and believed the message. And in other passages you see that people were unaffected by both the message and the miracles. And Jesus warns us: “for false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24) But we have something better than signs and wonders: the apostolic Word of Christ.

But again. If someone comes to you with their problems, is there any good reason for them to listen to you?

The ancient art of rhetoric can help us here. Rhetoric is the art of speaking well so that someone believes what you say. And what you say has real impact on their lives. The three main areas of rhetoric are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* is the credibility of the speaker. *Pathos* is the emotional connection with the hearer. And *logos* is the grammar and logic of what you say. All three are important whenever you speak, whether it's a casual conversation or an impassioned plea. Let's look at them in turn.

[*ethos*]

First, *ethos*. *Ethos* is your credibility to speak about what you're speaking about. Jesus had incredible *ethos*. John the Baptist points Jesus out as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." You could say it the same way by saying "Behold the spotless Lamb of God." God the Father, after the Baptism of Jesus, publicly praises His Son: "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) When you read in the Psalms about God being pleased with a Man, think first of Jesus. In the first miracle recorded in Mark, the people are amazed at the teaching of Jesus: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." (Mark 1:27) The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is proof that He lived a sinless life. Jesus had incredible *ethos*!

How's your *ethos*?

Since you are a Christian, you're starting out with great *ethos*. The "Treasury of Daily Prayer," which contains the daily lectionary that's also printed in the bulletin, includes a meditation by a church father. This week, there was an incredible meditation drawn from Dr. Luther's commentary on Galatians.

"Now the true meaning of Christianity is this: that a man first acknowledge, through the Law, that he is a sinner, for whom it is impossible to perform any good work. For the Law says: "You are an evil tree. Therefore everything you think, speak, or do is opposed to God. Hence you cannot deserve grace by your works. But if you try to do so, you make the bad even worse; for since you are an evil tree, you cannot produce anything except evil fruits, that is, sins. 'For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23)..."

The second step is this: If you want to be saved, your salvation does not come by works; but God has sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. He was crucified and died for you and bore your sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:24). Here there is no “congruity” or work performed before grace, but only wrath, sin, terror, and death.”¹

Confessing your sins is no small thing. Depending on the grace of God is no small thing. These are both gifts of the Holy Spirit. And it puts a heavenly smell on you. And people will notice.

But one way they will NOT notice this heavenly smell is if you live as if your Christian faith doesn't matter. People who claim to be Christian, but engage in sexual activity outside of marriage live as if their Christian faith doesn't matter. People who claim to be Christian, but never pray or crack open the Bible during the week live as if their Christian faith doesn't matter. People who claim to be Christian, but never darken the door of a church live as if their Christian faith doesn't matter. People who claim to be Christian, but never give of their time, money or attention to anyone else live as if their Christian faith doesn't matter. In short, if you live as if Christ doesn't matter and you matter the most, you've lost your Christian ethos. Why would anyone listen to what you say about Christ or His Word?

Thanks be to God, this heavenly smell is always available again in the means of grace. Remembering your baptism, receiving the holy absolution, listening to the preached Word, and partaking of the visible Word of body and blood refreshes you with the heavenly smell of the Holy Spirit. The Bible and real life are full of examples of how people came back to the faith after being lost like the prodigal son.

And this doesn't mean you live a perfect life. This means you live a life of repentance and faith. And this life of repentance and faith gives you a strong Christian *ethos*.

¹ AE 26, pgs. 126-7

[*pathos*]

Second, *pathos* is your ability to sympathize with those you are speaking with. Of course, Jesus had perfect *pathos*. When Jesus is about to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem, He laments: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

(Matthew 23:37) In the feeding of both the 4,000 and 5,000, Jesus is moved by compassion because the people are in a desolate place. Jesus cried at the death of Lazarus to the point where they exclaim, “See, how He loved him!” The compassion of Jesus is what drove Him to the cross to pay for you sins. “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

(Romans 5:8) Jesus has perfect *pathos*.

How is your *pathos*?

You should have great Christian *pathos*. You of all people know how sinful men, women, and children are in their natural state. You of all people know that we are all one in Christ. As Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus... [you are] heirs according to promise!” (Galatians 3:28,29) You should know that people are never the enemy. As Paul says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12) When you treat someone as Christ would treat someone, you have great Christian *pathos*.

This great Christian *pathos* can be ruined by being a sin hunter. Have you ever met someone where you cannot do anything right? Everything you do is wrong somehow. All they point out is your flaws and errors. St. Augustine has a wonderful quote about this very thing:

“Let us never assume that if we live good lives we will be without sin; our lives should be praised only when we continue to beg for pardon. But men are hopeless creatures, and the less they concentrate on their own sins, the more interested they

become in the sins of others. They seek to criticize, not to correct. Unable to excuse themselves, they are ready to accuse others.”²

If you constantly hunt for someone else’s sins, why would they listen to you? But you don’t need to compromise with someone’s sin or condone their sin, and you CAN treat them with the same mercy Christ has shown you. If you focus the Law on your own sin and the Gospel on someone else’s sin, you will indeed have great Christian *pathos*.

[*logos*]

Third, *logos* is the ability to confess Christ and His Word clearly and cleverly. Jesus, of course, is the *logos* incarnate. He always said the right thing at the right time. He chastised when He needed to like when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple. He provided words of comfort to Mary and Martha when they were grieving over the death of their brother Lazarus. He said the perfect thing to the rich young ruler who relied on his own works for salvation. “Go and sell all you have to the poor.” The young rich man went away sorrowful, but we have good reason to believe that this young man was John Mark who penned the Gospel of Mark and was such a help to the early church. Jesus says to you, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus says to you “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus says to you, “Take, eat... take, drink, for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.” Jesus has impeccable *logos*.

How’s your *logos*?

As a Christian you have the perfect *logos*, or Word. Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, by My words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) St. Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man [and woman] of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2nd Timothy 3:16-17) St. Paul also says, “For the Word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us

² Saint Augustine, Sermon for Trinity 14

who are being saved it is the power of God... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:20, 25)

You know that discussions with other people is hard. A while back, we studied a wonderful book by Greg Koukl called “Tactics.” In it we learned two powerful questions: 1) “What do you mean by that?” and 2) “How did you come to that conclusion.” These are wonderful weapons when you are discussing anything with someone who doesn’t agree with you. And when you add the patience born out by knowing that you are saved, you exhibit a wonderful Christian *logos*.

What can get in the way of this? Obviously, not knowing the Word in two senses. The first sense is not knowing the Bible or the confessions. The Bible is the very Word of God and our confessions are the best explanation of the Bible that has ever been produced by the effort of men. The second sense is not knowing that the mercy of Christ is *for you*. We like to make a big deal of this *for you*. It is a big deal. The ideas of Christianity are not some esoteric, moral, or philosophical system, but are very practical. They are for *your* salvation. If you don’t know the Bible or that the work of Christ is for sinners, especially you, why would anyone listen to you?

But if you know the Bible and the love of Christ personally, people will notice and listen to you because you are exhibiting Christian *logos*.

[*conclusion*]

Much more could be said about *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, but this is a good start. Now, if you and I have authentic *ethos* and persuasive *pathos* and compelling *logos*, we still won’t have a crowd pressing in on us like Jesus did. Jesus is one of a kind. And if anyone responds to our message, they are responding to Christ and not just to us. And it seems like many in our communities and country are not responding to the Gospel. Our churches are getting emptier and emptier. Things in our society seem to be getting darker and darker. But remember that the darker it is, the brighter the light of Christ shines.

Many in the church have responded to shrinking numbers by trying programs, especially from the business world, or by becoming like the world in message and feel. Many churches try to gather the same kind of crowd that was pressing in on Jesus but abandon His Word and institutions. But the church doesn't grow by crowds. It grows one person at a time, whether it's your child or grandchild, the person you hang out with, or even the stranger you come across. One by one, God gathers a remnant to Himself around His means of Word and Sacrament.

From the eyes of the world, or even your own eyes, it may look weak, but it is anything but weak. But listen to God's view of His church:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’” (Revelation 7:9-12)

So let us live with the knowledge that Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church; yes, every one of us, is part of this great multitude. Let us live as if Christ mattered most. Let us strive to confess our Lord Jesus faithfully to everyone that God puts in our place. And let us look forward with a living hope to how God will bless all of us in Christ.

Amen.